

RAYNER HEPPENSTALL

The Connecting Door



BARRIE AND ROCKLIFF
LONDON

© RAYNER HEPPENSTALL 1962
FIRST PUBLISHED 1962 BY
BARRIE AND ROCKLIFF (BARRIE BOOKS LTD.)
2 CLEMENT'S INN, LONDON WC2
PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
ROBERT CUNNINGHAM AND SONS LTD.
LONGBANK WORKS, ALVA

CONTENTS

I	9
II	47
III	91
IV	133

THE CONNECTING DOOR

I

AT WHATEVER TIME I AWAKE, BELLS ARE RINGING. The deepest-toned is that of the Minster. It is some distance away, and how clearly I hear it depends on the wind. It is as massive as the *gros bourdon* of Notre Dame in Paris or that of Sacré Coeur, which, if you are sitting at a café table in the Place du Tertre, distinctly raises your iron chair at each stroke.

Much closer is a bell of medium weight. It comes from Old St. Peter's, a hundred yards away. Mass is said there at six o'clock, seven and half past eight.

The first trams clang round the corner from the station square at half past five. I have not personally confirmed this. It is what Joseph told me on arrival, when I enquired if one heard station noises from the hotel.

I suppose that it is the bells themselves which awake me. Last night or, rather, in the small hours of to-day, I was even awakened by a telephone bell in the next room, at a quarter to three. These telephones have strangled, uncouth voices. I lifted my own telephone and began speaking into its mouthpiece. The walls are thin. The tone of the man's voice next door was dis-

tinctly evident to me. If the dialect had been one I understood, I should, I suppose, have made out half his words. I imagine the call to have been simply one from the night porter, rousing my temporary neighbour for an early departure. The man's head and mine were, I suppose, a foot or two apart, separated by two half-inch thicknesses of plaster, a space crossed by a few thin laths and two sheets of wallpaper identical in design, small roses over a lattice. Had I conscientiously stayed awake, I might, half an hour later, have heard from the station the sound of departure of the train in which my sleepy neighbour sat.

When I finally awake, I try to discover the hour from the coalition of sounds at that moment. At first, failing, I got out of bed and looked at my watch. It had stopped. Wound to a customary tightness, it stops no doubt at the sharp change of temperature as it is transferred from my hot wrist to the square of cold marble.

At first, the children at the school across the road merely confused me. My experiences at the École Alsacienne in the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs in Paris have cured me of any simple British assumption that, if there are schoolchildren in a playground, it must be getting on for nine o'clock, but, still, the sound was the same, whether it was eight o'clock or nine. From the point of view of guessing the time, it is clearly better to wake between the hours. Then, if I hear the children singing, I shall know that it is after eight.

They sing French folk-songs. Because their nursery background has not been French, they are learning the familiar ones. They sing '*Alouette*', for instance, and even '*Au Clair de la Lune*' and '*Sur le Pont d'Avignon*'.

I have not yet heard that delightful gavotte tune, with the absurd and quite non-youthful words, '*J'ai du bon tabac dans ma tabatière . . .*'.

The light through the shutters is no help. It is, after all, daylight by shortly after four o'clock. This I established on the journey here. If, however, I already know the time, the light through the shutters gives me some indication of the weather. Real sunlight, for instance, is slotted through like parallel sheets of white metal.

Eventually, I patter barefoot across the brown oil-cloth, kneel on the shabby, blue-green *chaise longue* with its bursting back-rest (Jeanne places the cushions so as to hide it) and pull at a piece of white braid which raises the shutters. The tall windows are covered with cheap net. There is nothing to hold the windows open, so that, with the wind in certain directions, they close themselves firmly or intermittently bang.

The church across the road is St. John's, a building in Dominican style. Only the far wall remains, with a cupola at the end to my right. This is at eye-level (I am on the fourth floor). In the bombed space stands a new church, as austere as a Welsh chapel and smaller. The classrooms of the *école maternelle* to the left are prefabrications of wood and plaster-board.

Old St. Peter's stands, undamaged, sixty or seventy yards beyond St. John's. It is built in red stone. It has a hexagonal short spire on top of a square tower. The oblong belfry is separate. Hitherwards of Old St. Peter's runs the canal, St. John's Quay on this side, the Quai Désaix on that. If I crane forward and look to the right, I see the top of a green bank which is in fact the earthwork lying across the main sluice-gates, the *grande*

échuse. Nineteenth-century barracks lie adjacent to former prison-towers remaining of the old ramparts. Immediately beyond these is Little France, the extreme southerly point of the old town.

In Little France, the overhanging houses crowd together about three parallel locks. Their balconies are crowded with flowers, and in the water are municipal bathing establishments and moored wash-houses. This is where the olive-green, still water is clearest.

My room has double doors, between which it is possible to become awkwardly wedged. In addition to the *chaise longue* and the brass double bedstead, it contains a large, built-in cupboard, a wash-basin and a *bidet* fixture with hot and cold running water before which a screen has been placed, the cane-bottomed chair and this minute and infirm table, over it a slippery white cloth. On it stand yesterday's *Dernières Nouvelles*, a guide-book, a bottle of ink, an ash-tray, eight packets of neatly stacked yellow *gauloises*, a novel called *La Peste* by Albert Camus and an open exercise-book, its stiff covers blue-mottled, three and a half pages of which have been filled with small handwriting.

THE MAN IN THE TOP BUNK WAS ALREADY ASLEEP. That was three and a half days ago, eleven o'clock in the evening at the Gare de l'Est.

The window was open and the blind drawn. It was too cold under the one red blanket. I slept badly. By five o'clock, light showed round the edges of the blind.

Then it vanished. We were under the Vosges. Over our heads rose contorted masses of clay and pink stone, clothed with shaggy fir-trees. Then light again. I dressed and went out into the corridor.

The Pullman attendant still lay on his let-down bunk, but I was not the first up. A narrow road ran parallel with the railway. Along it moved an ox-cart. No doubt it creaked or rumbled, but, to me, shut in with the train noises, it was silent. The bullocks were long-horned, cream or pale buff, silky.

Under their brown tiles and their washes of pink or pale-blue, lemon or orange, the square, timbered houses had a prosperous air. The fields were laid out in narrow strips at right angles to the road. There were hops, potatoes, maize, tobacco, asparagus, pale-mauve opium poppies. The Erckmann-Chatrian country, Phalsbourg and Saverne, was already behind us. Villages slid past. They had German-looking names, Hochfelden, Schwindratzheim, Mommenheim, Brumath, Stefansfeld, Niederhausbergen, Schiltigheim.

Suddenly, to the left, the improbably tall spire of the Minster reared up out of the plain and rushed towards us. The sun stood behind it, the glare breaking its fine, fretted silhouette, black but with a red glint, whether from the stone itself or from hot light widening through fissures of stone. Then came the chimneys of breweries and tanneries, here and there square outlines broken into heaps of bomb débris, perhaps as much as eight years old. The train slowed down and steamed to a halt.

The man from my top bunk, a business man of some kind, found a porter at once and was gone, raising his hat. I looked about for someone with the name of this

hotel on his cap. I had asked to be met. In the station, the light was grey and cold. The two of them found me, young Harold in his silver-grey flannel plus fours, not-quite-so-young Atha in a sports coat of pale Donegal tweed with too many buttons.

An elderly porter took my enormous, wood-banded, pale-green-canvas-covered trunk on his shoulder. We followed. At the station entrance stood a young man who looked a bit like the Austrian film actor, Anton Walbrook. This was Joseph from the hotel. He wore no cap.

The enormous square was empty but for kiosks in the middle and a few stationary trams, the small, leisurely, cream-coloured trams which tug each other about the city in twos, threes and fours. On the far side, one of a row of hotels was a partly cleared square of builder's rubble. Young Harold stared across at it thoughtfully. Then the two of them left me to Joseph, promising to see me again after breakfast.

Joseph spoke English. He had been, how you say, *incorporé de force* in the *Wehrmacht*. He did not look strong. He wore an ordinary blue suit, rather shabby, a black tie and not-very-clean white shirt. At the hotel, he spent some time running up and down stairs to get the lift to descend.

On the fourth floor, Jeanne ran me a bath. Jeanne's features are coarse, but not irregular. Her friendly smile displays gold fillings. A black jumper contains her big, round breasts. A black skirt encloses her round buttocks. Her complexion is pale. Her strong, shapely legs are pale, with fine, white hairs catching the sunlight. She is, I suppose, a country girl, sophisticated in one

or two obvious ways by hotel life. The dark hair is piled carefully on her head.

At first sight, she aroused coarse thoughts. She came on duty early in the morning. If there were few visitors, she had at first little to do. The commercial traveller, on an early call but with some minutes to spare, must often have thought of pulling her into bed. One did not feel that she would mind. To feel the temperature of the water, she leaned over the bath. The so vulnerable grooves in which the hamstrings lay at the backs of her round, white, rough knees added a stab of tenderness to the coarse thoughts.

These, however, I can see, will continue to recur. They recurred this morning, when I awoke early and heard her already in the carpeted corridor outside my room. Jeanne is not, I am sure, an intelligent girl, but neither is she mentally defective. Yesterday she helped me to make out my laundry list. I gave her some sweets, boiled sweets shaped like raspberries and with something like raspberry jam inside.

I went downstairs (this is again my first morning, Tuesday morning). Without a special key, you cannot, from an upper floor, call the lift up. Unless somebody has left it with the open gates on your floor, you walk down. The stair-carpet is red.

The young woman at the reception desk is capable and intelligent, helpful and, in essence, friendly. The complexity of her duties has stiffened her manner. The severity of her expression is due, one feels, to the fear that, if she too far relaxed, she might forget some of the many things she must bear in mind. This makes her seem plain, though, clearly, there is somewhere a man

for whom she would make a wonderful wife. From her I buy my *Dernières Nouvelles*. Sometimes I also buy a picture postcard off a revolving stand, a photograph of a stork's nest or of the Minster. I have now bought from this young woman four copies of the *Dernières Nouvelles*. That makes twenty francs. I must note even that, though whether I should charge up my morning newspaper to Mathew Latimer's or *The Examiner* is not yet clear to me.

A door to the left of the reception desk takes me into the dining room. It is quite strictly a dining room, in use only for dinner. At breakfast time and even for lunch, I pass through it to the restaurant beyond.

I like the restaurant. I now like the dining room, too, but the restaurant was my first love. The morning of my arrival later turned cloudy, and by mid-day there was rain. At breakfast time, sunlight still winked enticingly through the revolving doors. The room is square and ample. The plump-armed women behind the counter, among the urns, the dishes and the cash-register, wore friendly smiles and joked energetically in the dialect with each other and with familiar breakfasters.

The landlord strode among us, smiling and waving his plump, white hands. Joseph (a person, I quickly found, very little regarded at the hotel) had looked like Anton Walbrook. The landlord was a prosperous, well-dressed, smiling version of Erich von Stroheim, a Stroheim perhaps at last happy in love.

One eats, of course, national bread (three slices). This year, it is like coarse English brown bread. Last year, at Puits de la Lisière, it was bright yellow and

indigestible. The coffee is not quite *du vrai*, but it is at least *du bon*. There is a tiny, plated jug of hot milk, a flat oblong of sugar, a metal dish in the shape of a scallop shell on which lies butter the size of Mrs Beeton's walnut, a glass dish of thin, brown jam, probably rhubarb. It is a better breakfast than can be normally had in Paris this year. It costs ninety-nine francs, *service compris*. The table-covers are paper, but crisp and fresh.

I am bound to say that, even on the morning of my arrival, I did not rejoice in this waiter's company. Abnormally flat-footed even for a waiter, with a face like a monkey and dark, wavy hair, not old but not very young, he struck me as unintelligently rapacious, as one who had heard pre-war tales of gullible Englishmen. He is a sad soul. I do not wish him any harm. He works only in the restaurant and, at the end of the week, will be replaced even on breakfast duty by the youthfully charming Pierre or the long-faced, happy Italian, Serge.

The *Dernières Nouvelles* carries three or four pages of local advertisements, in addition to birth, death and marriage announcements and a marriage mart. It contains some national and even international news. It appears that we have lent the French ten million pounds. This can only stand me personally in good stead. M. Schumann has received a vote of confidence in the Chamber of Deputies. Count Bernadotte hopes for a truce in Palestine. The Russians are being troublesome to the British and the Americans both in Berlin and in Vienna. In London, the future of the Rhine is under discussion. But the regional news is clearly more important.

A woman in Metz has been done to death with an axe. There is a wine-fair at Colmar, and on Sunday there will be a rose-feast at Saverne. A milk-van crashed into a tree at Wissembourg, and on the Rehtal road two lorries met head-on and fell down the mountain side. At Sarrebouurg (where Annelies lived), a landlord who wanted to get rid of a tenant has taken the roof off a house. There was a slight earthquake yesterday, with its epicentre at Baden-Baden (I did not notice). Two peasants have had fatal accidents in the fields. One fell off his manure-cart, and the wheels went over his head. In the other case, a haycart overturned, and its driver was smothered under the hay.

THE DATE OF MY ARRIVAL WAS JUNE 1ST. YOUNG HAROLD (he is nineteen, rising twenty) arrived on the 1st of April, All Fools' Day, a Thursday, at four o'clock in the afternoon. He felt a bit of a fool, but did not mind.

He came *via* Tilbury-Dunkirk. On the boat, he took up with a girl who was going to Switzerland as a children's nurse. It was a night crossing. In adjacent deck-chairs, the two snuggled together under one hired rug, their foreheads and noses tormented by the same smuts. On the Bâle express, they had breakfast and luncheon together. At lunch, they shared a bottle of sweet Muscat. Afterwards, they went on embracing in the compartment. Harold attempted to persuade the girl not to go straight on to Bâle but to alight here and first spend a day or two (and, what was more to the

point, a night or two) at a hotel with himself. These overtures it seems that the girl resisted, though not without some regret.

When the train jolted to a halt at the station here, young Harold was taken by surprise. He assembled his belongings in a hurry and climbed down from the train. He then stood on the platform, one hand stretched up to the window, held, as he thought, in affectionate reluctance by the girl. When the train began to move, however, he found that it was simply the sleeve of his overcoat caught on the door-handle.

He disengaged it in time, but at that moment two policemen approached him. They took him to a cell on the station premises, where they searched him comprehensively. (The following day, as in due course he read in the *Dernières Nouvelles*, two German spies were picked up as they alighted from that afternoon train.) The first three nights Harold spent at the Hôtel des Vosges, across the station square.

It was on the Sunday afternoon when he installed himself with the Willms in the Place de Bordeaux. At nine hundred francs a month with full board, this was an expensive lodging, but it was very much pleasanter than the others to which advertisements in the *Dernières Nouvelles* had led him.

On Monday morning, Harold crossed the Contades, a small park of no great amenity but containing a restaurant and a bandstand, and, by way of the Quai Koch, reached this wide square before the university, that solid building in grey stone, with Zwingli's name oddly prominent among those gilt-lettered over the architrave. He enrolled himself with Mlle Kuntz, in

charge of foreign students. As he walked out of the building, he met Umpleby.

This was a surprise. It was not altogether a welcome surprise. After three days adrift in a strange city, it is always quite nice to see a familiar face, and Umpleby's was a very pleasant face, though a bit comic (wide-mouthed, the small nose a bit pink and shiny, the fair hair stiff and calf-licked). But Harold had not expected to meet anybody he knew. That had been one of his reasons for coming here, instead of going to Clermont-Ferrand, say, or Besançon or, for that matter, to the Sorbonne. Umpleby had the best possible reasons for coming here, since he also did German. Although Harold had taken to writing verse, the greatest figures in his pantheon were the German symphonists, but he knew no German, apart from those lyrics of Heine and others which had been set to music by Schubert, Schumann, Brahms and Hugo Wolf. A fair number of these he knew by heart, though only with the melodic line attached.

It rained the day after Harold's arrival (it rained the day of mine). A week earlier, there had been snow. A week later, it was already hot. In the Place de la République, magnolia blossoms cupped the moonlight. The scent of lime-trees in flower was, he states firmly, thick in the air in the Place Broglie ('the Breuil'). On the café terrace in the Orangerie, bumble-bees drunk on lime-nectar would (he says) plop into your beer from the foliage overhead, then, picked out, stretch one quivering leg after another and walk across the blue-and-white-checked tablecloth, buzzing with indignation.

It was Fritz Willm with whom, during those early

weeks, Harold walked in the Orangerie of an evening. Among the foreign students, he and Umpleby first made friends with a Polish-Jewish girl called Cesia, her friend Mieczyslas, a dark and luscious Russian girl called Sonia Sobouttian Soboutnikoff, Marie (a Lithuanian), a pair of Austrian-Jewish twins (female) and a Turk called Attila. Between lectures, they would gather in this square about the Pasteur memorial fountain. Harold fancied Sonia (still does). He sat next her in lectures, and on at least one occasion, to the astonishment of a professor with beard and *pince-nez*, she put her apricot-coloured arms about him, her black hair covering his face. Presently, however, this Sonia began to display an unfortunate preference for a tall Czech, who wore one of those attractive shirts with an embroidered neck-band. In 1918, the Soboutnikoffs had got out of Russia by the Tiflis route and been naturalised Persian.

After Sonia's defection, Harold went out several times with Maria. Maria, it seems, is less exuberant than Sonia. Indeed, the reason why her family sent her to study here was an entanglement with a married man, which has left Maria with a broken heart. She is, moreover, fair, and young Harold is attracted by dark colouring, not so much in itself as because he feels it to be more exotic and thus more poetic. Maria is, however, finely made and delicate-featured. She also has a rather pretty voice, and in this she once sang heartbroken little Lithuanian songs in a grotto in the Orangerie, much to Harold's delight, so that he wrote a poem about the occasion.

It is not a very good poem, I'm afraid, though I

remember, as sufficiently vivid, drops of water from a fountain being rendered as 'cold pearls upon the night's face softly blown'. There occur the lines:

All pain is silent, listening for the birth
Of a more perfect song within the air.

Also characteristic is the couplet:

And as the baffled heart in silence lies,
Moss-covered phoenixes stare with sightless eyes.

From an acquaintance with the conventional architecture of grottoes, I was inclined, before this afternoon, to suspect that the phoenixes would in fact turn out to be sphinxes, but certainly they are moss-covered in part.

You take a No. 3 tram along the Allée de la Robertsau. It is a long, broad avenue running north-east, and the trams move along it faster than when they are describing their unbelievably intricate manoeuvres about the town. You alight, and your feet crunch softly on gravel. From Harold I understood that, here at the entrance, always sat a beggar-woman, her leg and her crutch stretched forward, emerging from the folds of a black or navy-blue shawl, but this afternoon she was not there.

The Orangerie is a fair-sized park, and it contains a pavilion intended for residence by the Empress Josephine. There is a real orangery, with the trees in tubs. Birds sang. There was a breeze. I walked through green aisles of lime-trees, plane-trees, horse-chestnut, acacia, and came to formal French flower-beds, with begonias and the sharply patterned leaves of koleus. The gar-

deners were potting out geraniums. There were palm-trees in tubs, and there were fountains.

To one end of the Empress's pavilion, the English taste in gardening is observed. There are delphiniums, Canterbury bells, dwarf Michaelmas daisies. One group of statuary displays a chimpanzee sitting on a dolphin's back and forcing the water out of its mouth. Another shows a goose-girl in clogs. As I turned away from it, a jolly father and his two small children came towards me, playing marbles along the path. Click, click. The daughter accused her father of cheating. He laughed. They were gaily enchanted with each other's company. The marbles clicked sharply along the path.

The pavilion has a little clock-tower. The clock struck three, with a hard, metallic ring. My heart was suddenly wrung for the Empress Josephine. She was missing all this, by which I suppose I mean just being alive now (and here, for, truly, this place and these people do cause the heart to expand). Besides, Napoleon must have been an awful fidget. And she was barren.

I turned into the main walk, by one end of the boating lake. Over there was a little zoo, to this side of it an open-air restaurant, at which I am told that the food is very good, despite the fact that the waitresses (none of them at the moment visible) serve you in regional costume. Across the lake is Harold's big café terrace, with trees. Below this, he was sitting on a park bench.

He seemed, I thought, just a trifle discontented, though, on the other hand, extremely fit, more sun-burnt than on Tuesday, his hair yet more sun-bleached, a kind of sun-dazzle (though this afternoon the sky was a little overcast) in the pale-blue eyes. Perhaps it was

simply fatigue, which, it appeared, he had every reason for feeling to-day. He still wore the same silver-grey flannel plus fours, his jacket loosely over his shoulders in what appears to be the local undergraduates' fashion.

Before I turned about to sit beside him, I looked at the trees on the café terrace behind. They were horse-chestnuts, not limes, rather closely planted and much-trimmed. Still, at the right time of year, bees, I suppose, could get drunk just as easily on chestnut-blossom. I had similarly noticed that there were only plane-trees in the Breuil.

There seemed no point in mentioning either discovery. The lime-tree is important in the Goethe-Schubert, Heine-Schumann world.

*Am Brunnen vor dem Tore,
Da steht ein Lindenbaum. . . .*

Though, now that I come to think of it, that may be Schubert, but it is not Goethe. For the moment, that was young Harold's world.

He had stayed only four weeks with the Willms, though he continued to frequent Fritz Willm in the evening. It was purely a matter of expense. Full *pension* at the Willms was rather more than Harold's father had counted on, and he, by no means a rich man, had refused to augment the monthly amount first agreed on. Harold, too, had lost money on two occasions, once during an evening of riotous drunkenness in the German student tradition and once, presumably by pick-pocket, while he stood in a crowd watching the Joan of Arc Day procession. So he had moved in with Umpleby.

They had taken a room together over the École Pigier in the Avenue des Vosges. They took their meals, including breakfast, at the Gallia, the students' restaurant, where they paid by student's voucher. It was cheap and convenient, and the food was good, though not quite on the Willm scale, the standard there being set by the Swiss consul and people from the British and German consulates-general, who came in daily for luncheon.

Fritz Willm would be at his office in the railway administration. Umpleby had gone to a lecture. Recently, both he and young Harold had been cutting their lectures. After some weeks of hiking and climbing small mountains in the nearer parts of the Black Forest, Umpleby's conscience had smitten him.

'Mine hasn't smitten me yet,' said Harold.

Although he sometimes used learned circumlocutions with ease and had clearly read a great deal, young Harold's accent was decidedly, though not distressingly, from beyond the Trent. His speech was unemphatic. There was a hint of singer's resonance in his voice, which normally sounded between the eleventh and thirteenth below middle C. The sun had bleached a reddish tinge out of his hair. He did not possess much in the way of a profile, but the face was mobile and not altogether displeasing, the head rather markedly brainy.

I asked if there were any more poems.

'One,' said Harold.

Out of the left-hand pocket of his jacket he fished a small notebook, with stiff, marbled covers. In it, written out in violet ink, were already some twelve or fifteen short poems. The most recent was called

Waldesrauschen. While I read it, young Harold brought out of his right-hand jacket pocket a folder of un-gummed cigarette papers and a packet of German tobacco. He rolled a cigarette.

'Umpleby and I,' he said, 'both prefer German tobacco. We go over to Kehl and smuggle it back in our plus fours. Umpleby smokes a pipe. Fritz's brother, Jean, taught me to roll cigarettes. The trouble is, without gum, they sometimes fall apart.'

From the café behind us and at a level well above our heads, a loudspeaker had begun to play a song from *The White Horse Inn*. A girl passed, stepping rather prettily, perhaps even mincingly, her colouring very fair, the lips bright without make-up, the forehead a bit German and bulging, young, very young really, but full-busted in the cheap, often-washed, pale-blue jumper, nice legs without stockings, small, flat-heeled shoes, toes carefully placed as she walked, books under one arm. I give all this detail, but in fact only glanced at her briefly as she passed. I was reading the poem. In essence it was a first-cuckoo poem, though combined with sun-bathing in the woods, so that, although it was newly done, its reference must have been a month old.

I read it twice and then turned to Harold to say that I liked this poem better than the last one, though . . . But he was not there beside me. He had been sitting on my right. I looked along the path in that direction. The girl had almost rounded the boating lake. Young Harold was not quite a hundred yards away, in what was not quite hot pursuit.

He turned and waved, then with his finger attempted to describe his intended movements to me. Clearly, he

was unacquainted with the girl, but meant that it should not long remain so if any shadow of encouragement were offered. I waved back, rather hoping to indicate that I hoped to see him again presently.

I read the poem once more. The idea was that a state of delightful near-insensibility, induced by forest-sounds and the sun overhead, was shattered by the first note of the cuckoo's call and that sudden sharp consciousness was lulled again as it completed the descending third. I looked up again. The young woman was sitting on a bench directly opposite, across the lake. Harold was, as one might say, bearing down upon her, though still some twenty or thirty yards away.

It would not have been friendly to watch the next minute or so. I looked down again at the violet ink, the immature but mannered handwriting (its Greek ϵ 's, for instance). Overhead, the loudspeaker sang in a vigorous tenor:

*Adieu, mein kleiner Garde Offizier,
Adieu, adieu,
Und vergiss mich nicht, und vergiss mich
nicht. . . .*

It would sound louder across the boating lake. I looked up again. Harold and the girl were sitting side by side in easy discussion. At one moment, I thought he was looking my way, I showed the mottled notebook, pointed at it, slipped it into my pocket. Then I got up and walked on. I passed through the grotto, with its moss-covered sphinxes and bubbling spring.

By way of a rather dull tract, though with well-grown trees, you come to gates and a road on which stand new suburban houses. These are the fringes of the elegant

Quartier des Quinze, where stands, for instance, our consulate-general.

As my friend the Hon. Bert has already twice reminded me, it must not be long before I call and pay my respects to the consul (strange, how respectable I have become). He thinks it will do, though, if I turn up without fail to the *cocktail* for the King's birthday next Thursday. The Hon. Bert's own office is in town. From there, he runs a kind of one-man British Council, though in fact he belongs to the consulate-general.

You turn left. The suburban houses give out. There is a wooden bridge over the Rhine-Marne canal. By it stands an inn called '*Le Joyeux Marinier*'. Rue des Bosquets. Rue . . . The guidebook doesn't go beyond the bridge. The Rhine still lies north-east, so if you take what I suppose is (in essence) the tow-path . . . That would be where Harold and Annelies and Annelies's plain friend and Attila will turn off. No, not Attila, that Sunday afternoon.

There are distant harbour noises, hammering, faint hooters. It is a long, desolate road, but planted with chestnut and plane-trees. The port could be reached by any of those three water-lanes to the right.

To the left, it might already be open country. There is a cottage. There is a white goat tethered in its front garden. Beyond, a field, then trees, the Robertsaus woods.

On the right, three barges, tied up. Seven white ducks play follow-my-leader on the poplar-shaded water. At the water's edge grow familiar English weeds, knapweed and bindweed, thistles, willow herb (great hairy, not rosebay). There are reeds, rushes.

The hammering is closer. In the distance, a dog barks (sounds carry over the still water). You pass a wooden café. A rusty railway line comes to the water's edge, not in use now.

Where this canal and the last water-lane meet, there is a sort of coastguard-station in new brick, pink geraniums all round its verandah. Ahead lie tin shacks, coal dumps, petrol in what look like small gasometers.

A petrol engine starts up. In the boat are two customs officers and a policeman. You come to a congestion of barges and paddle-steamers. At the road's edge, the dull-white, narrow-petalled stars of traveller's joy, old man's beard, on ragged bushes. A heavy barge is going out, two dinghies rearing at the swirl of the screw behind it. The boats are called by the names of writers, Flaubert, Anatole France (unimaginable in England). The port flag is like a Union Jack without the cross of St. George.

The road lies uphill. From the crest, you can see what may be the water of the Rhine and what are certainly cranes and gutted warehouses on the German side. A breeze springs up. You cross an iron bridge and bear left. Turning, you can see the distant spire of the Minster, and, yes, the breeze, coming up behind you from the heart of the Old Town, bears the sound of the great bell to your ears.

To the left are the Robertsau woods. No cuckoos there to-day, or, if so, they are silent, but from that direction comes the heavenly scent of what, this time, must truly be limes. As it does when you approach the sea, the air has suddenly brightened.

On the far bank, that must be the spire of Kehl

church, standing among the ruins. French families are living there now. But, indeed, Kehl was founded by the French. There Beaumarchais printed the dangerous thoughts of Rousseau and Voltaire. At this point, the only trees are on the right of the road. They are sycamores, perhaps maples. On the grass bank, there are poppies, yarrow, St. John's wort, sage, meadowsweet, brambles, other plants I don't know, perhaps not in the English flora.

Now the canal lies behind you, and this, this is the open Rhine. This really is the Rhine, churning impatiently towards the sea, though with a *détour* of three hundred miles yet to go.

At the bend, to the left, a rock stands out into the water. A kind of Lorelei rock. You might think she sat there, combing her golden hair, luring those who sail the Rhine to destruction. A rock? No, shattered concrete. A French gun, or machine-gun, emplacement, built nine years ago, if not seventeen or eighteen, more recently blown up by one side or the other. The twisted, rusty iron is like hair, and the concrete clings to it like scurf.

Further along, somebody at the water's edge is fishing. You cannot see him, but you can see his rod waving slowly up and down.

I LOVE THE RECEPTIONIST DEARLY, BUT I SHALL NEVER know her name. It is an advantage of the French mode of address that one might easily for years maintain polite and even friendly relations with a person without

ever learning, or feeling that there was any need to learn, his or her name. The receptionist will remain 'Mademoiselle'. It may not even be accurate. It seems quite possible that she is the adored, intelligent wife of a working-class husband and that, on her way to the hotel, she takes their two quiet, spotless children to the *école maternelle* across the road.

Her desk is at two steps above street level. In the dining room, I sit at that level and with my back almost exactly to hers through a wall more substantial than that between the bedrooms, at any rate on the fourth floor. The greater part of the dining room is at street level.

The thinness of the bedroom walls could become a bit of a trial. There are more people in the hotel. They are, I suppose, assembling for the Festival. Three nights ago, it would be a commercial traveller's early call which made me, almost in my sleep, begin speaking into the mouthpiece of my own telephone. Last night, the bed in the next room creaked rhythmically for an impressive period of time. Before and after the rhythmic creaking, there was the sound of dance music on a gramophone. Before, yes. That I can understand. Afterwards, no, since, when it stopped, there was no subsequent rhythmical creaking.

In the early morning, Jeanne is busy. Just pulling her into bed is no longer a practical proposition. The lavatories, too, are clogged with newspaper, so that to flush them may produce unspeakable results.

The flat-footedness of waiters is one of the saddest things. Even my nice Pierre (I would guess, recently married, but have not yet discussed this subject with

him) is a bit flat-footed at, say, twenty-five. Usually, in the dining room, I am served by him. On his day off, I am served by Serge. Pierre is handsome and, in essence, a dashing, independent fellow. Serge has great charm, but was, I fancy, brought up more resigned. Essentially, he likes being a waiter. This does not make him a better waiter than Pierre, who is admirable.

I have had no direct dealings with the head waiter, called, I believe, Jean. He never ventures off the street-level part of the dining room. He pulls, and smells at, a great many corks, but does not therefore necessarily serve the bottles out of which they came. He is middle-aged, with spectacles and a moustache. Pierre and Serge wear their white jackets even for dinner. Jean wears a tailed coat.

He is, at present, being rather beastly, in a negative sort of way, to a young woman who just wants an omelette. She wears a brown jumper and is probably English. I, therefore, ought perhaps to go to her rescue. On the other hand, she may not be English. I am afraid that Serge and even Pierre are, in a negative kind of way, participating in this beastliness. They are leaning against doorposts, napkins over their folded arms, pretending that they have never heard of such a thing as an omelette, though, conceivably, they may consider mentioning such objects when they next have to go through the restaurant on a more respectable errand.

I really don't quite know what to do. If, somehow, I could be appealed to *as an Englishman* (and, given the right circumstances, Pierre would, as our relations stand at present, put this thing to me squarely), I could act. Or, at least, I could speak. I could say that

the very nicest young Englishwomen did sometimes go into restaurants unaccompanied and order a simple omelette, which might well be all that, with the present currency restrictions, they could afford. I might have added, critically, that, after all, if they wanted that table for somebody else, the quickest way to get rid of the young woman would be to serve her at once with her omelette. I could have begun such a conversation if Pierre had come to my table for any reason whatever. I could have called him if there had been the shadow of an excuse. But it is understood that my *truite pochée au bleu aux amandes* will take twenty minutes. The right trout will first have to be located in one of those mountain streams in the Vosges. Then it will have to be caught. I have clearly indicated that the huge soup tureen could be taken away. I have my white wine in the little blue-and-grey jug of local stoneware, gothically lettered, *Trinkt wie Eure Väter aus Stein den Wein*. I have an ash-tray. I have the menu. I have a basket of bread. I have butter.

And the girl may not be English. I think she is. I think she is a schoolteacher, abroad on her personal allowance of twenty-five pounds. But she speaks adequate French and is yet unperceptive of all that she has come up against. I can only renounce my position as an ambassador of my country, to say nothing of my position as a knight errant.

The walls of my part of the dining room are largely occupied by colour prints depicting peasants in the various regional costumes, for the black head-knot is strictly local to the immediate neighbourhood, where, indeed, like the surname-allocation of Scotch tartans,

it developed only last century. In Geispolsheim, the head-knot is red. In Wissembourg, it is replaced by a small, cylindrical lace coif. At Hanau, the Protestant skirt is green, the Catholic red. The shawl, the corsage and the apron also vary, and so do the hats and waist-coats of the men. Against corner-posts and in alcoves, there are wood-carvings, fishes and mermaids such as are traditionally placed like figureheads on the ornate wine-barrels.

The food here is excellent. There are several four-star restaurants in town, with trout-pools and what not, but I can see that I shall normally dine here. For one thing, I am usually pretty tired by the evening, and it is convenient to clean up in my room, flop on the *chaise longue*, dally briefly with Jeanne as she comes in to take the bed-cover off and turn the sheets down, then unhurriedly descend the four flights of red-carpeted stairs, exchange a few words with the receptionist, sit here undisturbed at what is now regarded as my usual table and discuss the menu and the day's news with Pierre or Serge or, once in a while, the immaculate, beaming Erich von Stroheim.

I suspect that young Harold does not dine regularly at all. Brought up to a north-country high-tea and late supper routine, he still thinks of the mid-day meal as his dinner. One bad habit he has formed is that of drinking beer with his breakfast or, rather, before he calls for his *complet*. Except when they are out hiking in the Black Forest or the Vosges, he and Umpleby then also lunch at the Gallia, normally at the same small table served by a young, fair, wispy-moustached waiter called Paul, recently married.

As he darts, sweating, around his tables, Paul regularly avers:

'La vie est dure, et les femmes sont chères!'

Umpleby and Harold are fond of Paul, who in turn seems devoted to his only two English. The food at the Gallia seems respectable, though young Harold finds it sometimes too redolent of garlic and is contemptuous of the *poudings*. The two boys never drink wine at the Gallia, but the beer is first-rate. They drink Schutzenberger in preference to Tigre Bock. On their hiking days, they dine at the Gallia. I am not sure what they eat for the rest of the day when they have lunched there. Perhaps, when out with Fritz Willm, young Harold simply crunches an occasional *pretzel* or calls for a sizeable hunk of *kugelhopf*.

They are aware of other students, but do not mix with any of those who eat at the Gallia. There are two main large groups, one of Roumanian and one of Bulgarian students. The Roumanians strike the two boys as the more civilised-looking, the Bulgarians being apparently swarthy and tending to long side-whiskers. Attila is never at the Gallia, but there are other Turks in evidence, one of them fabulously handsome, so that all the girls are lined up to be seduced in turn by him. To be found not infrequently with the Bulgarians is a young woman Harold finds intolerably attractive. Her black hair, parted in the middle, is drawn back to a heavy coil in the nape. She commonly wears a two-piece tailor-made costume in navy-blue, over a bright red jumper. Sometimes she leaves the jacket off, and then the forward thrust of her violent breasts makes the boy feel quite ill with a desire he regards as hopeless,

since he recognises in her a woman of such high sexual voltage he cannot imagine himself approaching her. He is astonished by the easy familiarity with which the raffish young Bulgarians treat her. At times, she even seems to bore them and has been known to step quivering off as though insulted.

These groups of students do not take any of the same classes as Harold and Umpleby. They are established at the university for more than the semester which is all that the two English youths, along with Cesia, Mieczyslas, Attila, Maria, the Austrian-Jewish twins and Sonia Soboutnikoff, are up for. None of these eats at the Gallia.

Jean has vanished. Serge has brought the school-teacher in the brown jumper her omelette and is being charming to her. This is a great relief. At least that young woman has not gone abroad in order to eat, and, more specifically, to eat steaks, which is what a great many Englishmen are still doing. It is vulgar, though understandable. I have eaten steaks enough and am now in a veal phase, though a *carré de porc* would also go down very nicely. But here comes Pierre with my *truite aux amandes*.

THE RHINE AGAIN, A MILE OR SO TO THE SOUTH (AND upstream), the port area lying between the two points. This is the highway into Germany, and to-day the sun blazes.

The string of little yellow trams wanders southward through industrial suburbs and rides up a slope between

great spaces of cleared debris. There was once a pinnacled bridge, with the French and German custom houses on it. It may still be seen on picture postcards. The present footbridge is a sappers' construction of wood, with pointed breakwaters upstream. The French customs are on the far side, in Kehl.

You walk along the path upstream to the right, and the first thing you see is a rough-hewn slab of pink stone, polished on one side and bearing the names of nine men, aged between twenty-four and forty-one, who were murdered at this point and their bodies thrown into the Rhine by the Gestapo in flight, in November 1944, three and a half years ago. Before the unimpressive monument, people have placed poppies and white campion in food-tins.

Further on, a larger white stone proclaims that here General de Lattre de Tassigny, bringing the French First Army back from Germany five months later, crossed the Rhine to confirm the liberation of Alsace. Further again, another wrecked concrete emplacement.

And now the open river. All that sliding surface of water, dimpled here and there by what are probably very awkward currents, death to swimmers. A powerful barge curves downstream at a remarkable speed and sends long waves pulling at the reeds and grasses.

I turn back. Between the end of the tramlines and the footbridge, the last house on the French side is a block of workers' flats. The concrete surface is badly pitted with bullets. At an open window on the third floor, a young workman in a blue-and-white striped jersey plays the accordion.

Too hot to eat a big lunch. In the cool interior of any of these large inns, I could get a plate of small fry, Rhine whitebait, a small jug of white wine, cherries. It might turn out to be the inn I hear of from not-quite-so-young Atha.

Young Harold and Fritz Willm sometimes come out this way on a Sunday morning. Not to-day.

The fair girl in the Orangerie turns out to be called Annelies. She is only fifteen. This seems a bit young even to Harold, though, as he says in somewhat less elegant terms, her person is mature. *Il y a du monde au balcon.*

Annelies lives in Sarrebourg with a widowed mother, but during the week is a boarder at a commercial school, sometimes going home on Saturday evening. The girl and her mother are of German origin, but naturalised French. A further meeting has been arranged.

THE ILL, FLOWING MORE OR LESS PARALLEL WITH THE Rhine, branches to form an island, and on that the Old Town was built. Inside the city boundaries, old or new, there is nothing which resembles a river. There is, instead, a complex system of canals. The Ill, however, enters at the south-west as a river and leaves as a river in the north-east, towards Robertsau. Also, I suppose, towards Fuchs-am-Buckel, where the Hon. Bert and I had lunch on a terrace beside the river.

This guide-book cost sixty-five francs at the book-shop on the *far* side of the university square. It is evident for how long young Harold has been cutting

lectures. He still insists that it is on *this* side, next door to the Gallia.

Harold a bit cross. The girl did not turn up. He thinks she must have gone home for the week-end. Hung round the school at mid-day to-day without success. He and I are, of all things, to visit Ste-Odile by charabanc on Wednesday. This must be kept from the Hon. Bert.

He lives and functions in Titmouse Street. My hotel is just off the island. I am on it, here, in the Street of the Old Winemarket. There one turns right towards the Place Kléber or carries on to where, from a first-floor window, projects the pole from which a large Union Jack droops. Hon. Bert takes it in at sundown.

Hon. Bert is plump, dark, jolly, quick in his movements, not really at all shrill. Far nicer than anyone in either London or Paris said. A friendly soul. He clearly feels that my social deportment is his concern and was at first greatly afraid that I should disgrace him. This did not stop him at once beginning to lay himself open. Now I believe he feels that, however doubtful my accent and however horrible some of the shirts I wear, I shall not seriously compromise his position here. With the Phinelius *château* to-day, he has, I feel, already produced his prize exhibit or, rather, exposed me to his most exacting judges, his acid test. The occasion went off quite nicely.

Of course, my forthcoming luncheon at the Prefecture *en toute intimité* did not fail to impress him. I did not expect it to.

In addition to his own flat, what Hon. Bert has at the Rue de la Mésange is a twofold office, with a French

(or, more exactly, an Alsatian) and an English (or, rather, an Irish) secretary, and a reading-room in which are displayed all the main British periodicals, including *The Daily Worker*. His charwoman cooks admirably, with a little help from himself. I buy duty-free English cigarettes from him.

He gets some return. I paid to-day at Fuchs-am-Buckel. He also got out of announcing the Berlioz *Requiem*. True, this was to my advantage, since I get paid in francs. Perhaps it was also a demonstration of faith in me.

It was at Holzheim that I saw my first stork's nest, a ragged heap of twigs on the chimney-stack of the presbytery. The parent storks stood erect in the nest, seem never to leave it. No doubt they catch frogs in the early morning and again at sunset, and that is their day. They return year after year, wintering in North Africa.

The village nearest to the Phineliu*s* *château* is said to have been very collaborationist in the war. In one respect, it shows an admirable spirit. Its church is used by both denominations. The Catholics hold their services in the choir, the Protestants in the nave. Try to imagine that in Ireland.

The *châtelaine* is religious and literary, her husband a landscape gardener. A long south wall has Stations of the Cross, commissioned from a young sculptor. A bit like Eric Gill, who, I suppose, never carved in this pink stone. About the plain below, yews have been disposed to look like cypresses. As the Hon. Bert says, you would think you were in Italy.

Here and there, a narrow pyramid, the top of a church tower, rose above a dark ring of trees and roofs,

and that was a village, yawning the afternoon away. Very hot. One saw where the Bruche valley opened into the Vosges. Up there lies the site of the Struthof concentration camp (we read of it as Natzweiler) and the new French army's battle school.

Mme Phineliuss served us with afternoon tea very much in the English manner, except that the pastries were better. They had seats for the Berlioz *Requiem*, and the two of them drove into town with us for dinner.

Just after eight o'clock, we came out of a deeply shaded side street into the Minster square. The sun blazed full on its west front, whose particles of quartz gave back the light. The stone is not uniform in colour. It varies from a delicate shell pink to brown in which there is only a dull red glare, but, in the direct evening sun, virgins, apostles, pinnacles and glass were all one iridescent salmon, a vast dazzle of pink and gold.

By half past eight, the light was gone. The vast nave of the Minster was illuminated only by huge candles in iron brackets. The archbishop had yielded, and the Catholic choirs of the Minster itself and Young St. Peter's had been joined by Protestant choirs from St. Thomas's and the Temple.

The RDF engineers had their apparatus in a small vestry. The microphone for the announcers was outside in a buttress corner, with a lamp about as strong as a night-light to read by. I expected to find some official with the announcements translated, typed and distributed in multiplicate. Miss Lenepveu would bring them, I was told. Miss Lenepveu was the French announcer.

At twenty-eight minutes past eight, no Miss Lenep-

vue. The orchestra had tuned. Charles Münch stood alert on the temporary rostrum. The engineers exchanged their final signals with London. The susurrus in the packed Minster was like a fever. At twenty-nine minutes past, a tall, handsome blonde in slacks appeared. The chief engineer showed her where the microphone had been placed. Miss Lenepveu asked after *le speaker anglais*. I was pointed out to her.

'I go first', she said, 'and then I give you.'

She held up a piece of paper. A light flashed. The chief engineer snapped his fingers and pointed to the microphone by the night-light. Miss Lenepveu bounced at it and began to read. I stood behind her.

When she had finished, she turned quickly and gave me her piece of paper, on which her own announcement was written in French only and in highly characteristic French handwriting. The difficulty was knowing whether to speak of the orchestra as the *Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française* or as the symphony orchestra of the French national broadcasting organisation or as the French national radio orchestra and whether M. Jouatte should be described as 'of the Opéra' and what pronunciation of the name of Charles Münch would be most acceptable in London.

I must have managed, because in no time Münch was giving with the brass. When I looked inside the nave of the Minster, all the candle-flames lay flat, pointing towards the great doors.

It seems that I worried unnecessarily. France heard my opening announcement, but, when I presently wandered into the vestry, Miss Lenepveu slapped her thigh, shook her fair curls and delightedly told me that

London had been incorrectly plugged in and had missed the first two or three minutes of the music. The chief engineer was on the telephone, trying to make head or tail of some B.B.C. official's French and at the same time to establish his view that the fault lay with London.

He asked me if I would speak to London. I told the voice in London that I was a mere bystander who knew English and that I could not even undertake to interpret in a matter involving technical terms. It was an educated voice.

It said:

'Oh, well, never mind. I suppose our Paris office will find out. All we heard was a conversation between, I suppose, two engineers. They sounded very bored. I only hope it wasn't too obscene. Lovely performance going on now. . . .'

And indeed there was.

TO-NIGHT WAS CANDLES, TOO, BUT THEY WERE SMALL ones. Each music-desk had two in a crystal globe. The idea would be to re-create eighteenth-century musical conditions out of doors. The occasion was described in the programme as a *soirée-sérénade*. Linguistically, this seems a bit redundant.

It was in the courtyard of a palace built in the eighteenth century by the archbishop uncle of that cardinal prince de Rohan-Guéménée who was implicated in the Queen's Necklace affair. This palace stands opposite the south porch of the Minster. It was damaged in the war and has not yet been fully restored, so

that you cannot go through the palace on to the great terrace which lies, to the other side, along the Ill. There is, however, access, by way of a tapestried staircase, to a walk on the walls surrounding the courtyard and over the main gates.

We began with Couperin's *Concert dans le Goût Théâtral*. The music and the setting were of a period. Couperin was sixty years old when the architect began work in 1728, and he died while those red and beige stones were being laid patiently one upon another for thirteen years. There was some Lully, some Rameau, and then René le Roy played a flute concerto by Leclair.

All round the courtyard are sculptured heads on stone brackets. In the flickering light from so many candles, these periwigged heads seemed to nod sagely in time with the music. (Not too wild a fancy. What with expulsion of breath and movement of bows, the candles themselves must to some extent have flickered in time with the music.) Beyond that intense fairyland of candles, on top of the walls, life-sized ladies in classical garments sat on stone lions. Beyond, I could dimly make out the shape of the Minster and the south tower, if not the spire, lost in the darkness.

Periwig, ivory fan, turbaned black boys bearing cushions. The careful paces of minuet and gavotte, the formal bow which is a dance in itself. The ages circled warily about each other, for it was in Rameau's and Lully's time that Gibbon described in formal periods the German hordes lunging towards Rome, with their long moustaches and cross-gartered legs, in the fourth century. It was Julian the Apostate who drove them

back across the Rhine and saved Belgian Gaul for another fifty years.

Here, too, a new language, French, was first recorded in the Merovingian oaths. That Minster, which took so long to build, was finished the year before John Gutenberg invented printing here. Half a millenium later, an English writer, D. H. Lawrence, saw the Minster as I saw it two hours ago, 'a darkness within darkness'. Two days before, I had seen it as a brightness within the light.

The interval. I stood up. Those wooden garden-seats were very hard. I turned round. There was the palace itself. A pity one could not walk through to the riverside terrace beyond. I walked there this morning. In the still river, brown children bathed. On the terrace, art students sketched. There, the cardinals used to organise water sports for their royal guests, with fireworks.

People were crowding towards me. I turned again, up the tapestried staircase. White, dimly lighted walls, exquisite ironwork. Most of the figures in the tapestries are dressed like ancient Romans, with greaved, hugely muscular legs, but among them are cardinals with red hats and bishops with croziers.

You come to the walk along the walls and over the gates. I looked down upon that forest of candles. Their heat, as they burned down in the crystal globes, rose up to my face. I keep reminding myself that I am here as a journalist. I count the garden seats. Fifty to each row and forty rows. An audience of two thousand. I count the classical ladies on lions as I pass.

The Minster towered above me, very near, a comforting, giant shadow. A darkness within darkness is

sometimes a good thing, but Lawrence added that here were 'long, long prisons of stone'. He thought it a disease of the spirit that men should wish to build so high and so permanently. He was, he says, himself always glad as a boy when his card-castles fell. Well, he has had a part of his wish. The Americans made a nice hole in the north aisle.

Lawrence came here in the depth of winter, a sick and dying man with only two years to go. The city, to him, was itself dead. It was still winter when not-quite-so-young Atha arrived, though, in point of date, it cannot have been more than a month before young Harold's arrival, and, when *he* came, it was spring.

Though neither dying nor sick in any demonstrable sense, moderately-young Atha clearly had something of Lawrence's feeling about the place. In his circumstances, of course, he ought not to be here at all. I ought, I suppose, to note down that the age of fairly-young Atha (the *pseudo*-Atha, as I begin to think of him to myself) is in fact twenty-four. He is thus five years older than Harold and twelve years younger than me. Fritz Willm I think of as still in his early thirties.

BY AND LARGE, YOUNG HAROLD IS A CHEERY SOUL. At the École Pigier, the headmaster's wife, herself full of those French brave smiles, would, if the language in which she expressed herself were English, call him 'Smiler' (without any of that British anti-phrase which makes soldiers call short men 'Lofty'). '*Il sourit tout le temps.*' He does, indeed, whenever she is there. As soon as she has closed the door, his face becomes pretty expressionless.

Nothing of the sort could be said about after-all-quite-young Atha. In consequence, though no great smiler myself, I do not like him as well as I like young Harold, though Harold is a bit sorrowful at the moment. This is because of Annelies, the girl in the Orangerie.

Atha's bad circumstances were financial, amatory and religious. His London address is a rather old-fashioned Bohemian one. When I get back, I ought to inspect it.

He is supposed to be in love with a dancer, a *ballerina*. His handwriting is pretty but illegible. One at first thought that he was in love 'with a *ballista*'. This seemed odd. One hoped that it was not *a tergo*. It is not. On the other hand, its normality is in doubt. This

love grew more acute as it appeared that the young woman in question did not mean to expose herself to frontal attack.

The religious question had presented itself as follows. Brought up as some kind of nonconformist, Atha had wished to find himself a Catholic, having flirted meanwhile with various high-minded notions. He had got himself involved with English Catholicism both at its smartest and at its most liberal-minded. To his religious instructor, he presented this travelling abroad as a pilgrimage. There had been some talk of him spending a while in retreat at a French monastery. The sum with which he travelled abroad was less than twenty pounds, for some piece of writing.

I have mentioned his jacket of pale-grey Donegal tweed, bought, out of the original twenty pounds, from a shop in Charing Cross Road whose *clientèle*, to judge by the signed photographs in the window and inside the shop, consisted otherwise wholly of boxers and music-hall comedians. His trousers are ordinary, unpressed grey flannel bags, belted and trailing. Apparently, he possesses no overcoat. I should have thought this a serious deprivation in winter (it does not matter in June), but pale and emaciated Atha is clearly a good deal more hardy than he looks. He wears his fine, fair-to-sandy hair too long, but his finger-nails are clean.

Like me, he came *via* Paris, but the crossing had been Newhaven-Dieppe steerage, not in my subsidised 'Golden Arrow' style. He had not expected company, but in fact got that of a young Catholic married woman to whom, in a quite special way, he was devoted. She was off to join her husband in Paris.

I know both the husband and Benedicta, and I do not in the least marvel at frightful Atha's devotion. My connection with the Kings is somewhat involved, but, certainly, I am aware of them in at least one of the capacities in which they exist for him. It was in connection with Fr. Arbuthnot that religious Atha was introduced to Michael and Benedicta King. Even so, this was in part because of Michael's position as the young editor of *The Cross and the Sword*, which also concerns me, even professionally. Poet-and-intellectual Atha might, conceivably, have something to offer them. They, certainly, had space he might contrive to fill.

It must, in fact, be eight months since I saw either Michael or Benedicta. It is nice to hear of movements I heard first projected. For, of course, the Kings have always been, not precisely globe-trotters, but heart-of-Europe frequenters.

At any rate, pilgrim Atha, as he walked along the platform at Victoria, without overcoat and carrying only a rucksack, saw Benedicta's head projecting from a carriage window and talking animatedly to a man younger than himself, whom he had met and who was not merely devoted to Benedicta in his own way but positively her slave and also, to some extent, Michael's errand-boy, in connection with *The Cross and the Sword*.

This young man has, it appears, declared his intention, once he has reached latchkey age, of entering a Trappist monastery. In the meantime, he goes in for action with the Kings, who themselves, however, are sometimes attracted by contemplation. The young man is rather talkative, and censorious Atha does not quite see him keeping vows of silence. He likes, nevertheless,

the heroic ambience in which such possibilities are seriously debated by young men.

It was a grey day, and, out of Newhaven, the spray-laden wind was icy on the boat deck. It was five years since Atha had last crossed the Channel. Until last year, I myself had not set foot on the European mainland for eleven years.

'Le voyageur solitaire est un diable,' says Henry de Montherland, who ought to know.

It is true that the shedding all at once of our ties both to person and to place leaves us open to unholy possibilities. We are suddenly irresponsible, or responsible only to ourselves. But it is not only devils who are irresponsible. Angels are irresponsible, or responsible only to God, which is much the same thing. A year ago, I was the type of angelic traveller. As we measured the hem of the white cliffs of Dover, I sat in my second-class carriage, a dedicated spirit, dedicated, I suppose, to the new.

Of course, I had read Horace, and I knew, in theory, that to travel changes nothing, that nobody can leave himself behind, that, as soon as we step beyond the Gare du Nord, our daily habits and preoccupations will take us by the elbow. This year already, I clung to my Pullman accommodation. I stayed below, sipping brandy with a girl from the British Council, no amateur of winds like whetted knives, no connoisseur of spray. I coldly noted the town-hall clock-tower rising above young Harold's shattered Calais. When, from the heights of Montmartre, the domes and minarets of Sacré Coeur gathered speed and raced to meet the train, I did not suppose that, before the last franc was

spent, my secret self would have translated itself into action on the boulevards.

On my first post-war trip abroad last year, however, I stood all the way from Folkestone as near the prow as I could, although such a wind blew up-Channel that the boat never rose upright until she was inside the breakwater off Boulogne. I thrilled to the cries of the French porters running aboard like a pack of untrained beagles. I thrilled to the different smell on shore, a difference, I suppose, which is chiefly one of tobacco.

Still, that was in June. I don't suppose I should have stood on the boat deck in February, with or without Benedicta King, let alone without an overcoat and far less from Newhaven to Dieppe.

If it has been correctly reported to me, I might, I think, even have found the conversation boring. For it appears that Benedicta and ridiculous Atha together recited Keats into the wind and that they talked about saints in what I can only regard as a childish manner.

Atha, moreover, states unashamedly that at one point he said:

'Perhaps it's a mistake to cross the Channel except with a person you're in love with.'

Benedicta thought there was something in this.

'It's a pity,' said Atha, 'we're neither of us in love, at any rate not with each other.'

'Yes,' sighed Benedicta.

Then, apparently, solemn Atha said:

'Benedicta, what *colour* is contemplation?'

And, straight off the cuff, Benedicta replied:

'Oh, blue! Blue as the note of a flute!'

This was also thoughtful Atha's opinion. It is, I may

say, not mine. At any rate, I am more conscious of a quite different type of mystical thought, the result, no doubt, of reading Kierkegaard. I am not much disposed to mysticism in summer. From March onward, a healthy paganism prevails. Categories remote from common experience belong to the winter months. I feel that 'the light of truth' is a thing one seeks for in the long, dark nights. It is artificial light, if not, indeed, more specifically, electric light. The very sound of Kierkegaard's name makes my eyeballs ache. He lived in the crackling, hyperborean light of the Baltic. His winters were very long, and his relaxations were to sit in brightly lighted theatres and cafés. Then he went home and 'burned the midnight oil'. No wonder he went unread until the age of electricity, for which clearly he yearned through northern winters a hundred years ago. No wonder that it was only during the war he came into his own. At first, the black-out had seemed more artificial than the preceding blaze of light. I first really took to Kierkegaard only after we'd laboured and stumbled through it for over five years.

Still, it may be that, essentially, contemplation with Roman Catholics is blue. This would have something to do with the Mediterranean, no doubt. I put the above conversation on record because it does seem to account for certain lines in a curious poem written shortly thereafter.

MY HAND STILL SMARTS FROM THE IMPACT, THROUGH
its black, threadbare skirt, of Jeanne's salient and

attractive bottom. While her gold fillings yet flash in the doorway and before the *rictus* has faded from my own face, I think of Arlette, and the muscles contract about my navel. Except through man's incessant lechery, there is no connection between the two. It is not the same kind of lechery, moreover. Moreover, but for Blod, I should never have seen Puits.

In her time, the house was a-building. The de Moors then lived in Paris, near the Parc Monceau, into which Blod took the children each morning. Puits-de-la-Lisière was simply a fact on Blod's horizon.

When, last year, I proposed to go and look at France again, Blod wrote to Mme de Moor, who promptly invited me, of whom she had never previously heard, to stay for three weeks. Three years previously, part of the house at Puits had reacted unfavourably to the fall of an American bomb on the next estate. This sinistralisation had left Mme de Moor a widow, M. de Moor having died shortly afterwards, '*sans doute,*' as Mme de Moor wrote with admirable laconicism, '*d'émotion*'.

At the Gare du Nord, Noémie and Yves stood by the engine. Noémie was to be wearing '*un tailleur aux petits carrés dans les beiges*', and I wore the green hat which met with such disapproving glances from young Harold and not-quite-so-young Atha on my arrival here the week before last. It is shaped into a flat pork-pie, and it looks as though it were made of dehydrated turf, so that, when I bought it in 1945, I half expected that at the first downpour it would melt and run down my face. For purposes of recognition, it could hardly be bettered. The young de Moors and I recognised each other without difficulty, and they took turns to drive

me out to Puits-de-la-Lisière, which lies about twelve miles to the west of Paris, on the fourth or fifth bend of the Seine. To reach it, we passed through less elegant suburbs.

Their name suggests that the de Moors were by origin Dutch. If so, the strain has been corrected by marriage. The conversation at table was of the most lively Gallic, and the eyes of all but the mother were dark, brilliant and restless. In the course of those three weeks last year, I became most intimate with the eldest son, Michel, who still lives at home. The recently married second son, Roger, then lived in the lodge, but has since moved into Paris. Yves is about to be married, and there is some hope for Noémie.

Michel de Moor, though younger than myself, is already a figure in the French banking world. He is strongly Anglophile. He reads *Time*, *The Continental Daily Mail* and the memoirs of Mr Churchill. He drinks whisky (at a thousand francs a glass), extends himself frequently in a long bath, eats fried eggs for breakfast on Sunday morning and practises his silences as well as his English on me.

The area is dotted with tapestried *châteaux*, chromium-plated *bars américains* and racing-stables. Across the Forêt St. Germain stretch sandy gallops for the horses which nowadays habitually win our English classic events. Last year, for instance, in a Boussac stableyard, I patted a Derby winner on the nose at two o'clock in the morning.

That is as intimate as I have ever been with a horse. It is true that I seem to have a very early memory of actually sitting on a horse. This would be outside the

Co-op stables behind Waterside Lane in Hinderholme. It would be an enormous, dappled-grey carthorse, and my paternal grandfather held its head. I cannot have been more than three years old, perhaps four. I suppose that my father held me. I have other memories, but I do not think that, since my legs were more than two feet long, they have straddled a horse. I have sometimes regretted this fact, though I cannot say that I have ever felt much drawn to people who rode, and especially to women who rode, in England.

That first Sunday morning in Puits-de-la-Lisière, Noémie de Moor told me about her equitation and asked me the (really, when you come to think of it, very curious) question:

'Savez-vous monter?'

And, clearly, the short answer was:

'Non.'

I did not know how to mount. I made no equitation. I had never made serious equitation.

Noémie no longer wore her two-piece, tailor-made costume in pale check. She was dressed in white sweater and chocolate-coloured jodhpurs. That was also the costume in which I first saw Arlette the following week, except that her jodhpurs were in narrow-grained, creamy silver corduroy, which went better with her fine, very fair hair.

I had gone to mass with the de Moors. This was not altogether a popular move. As there was an English Protestant church in the neighbourhood, Mme de Moor clearly felt that I ought to have gone to that. I had tried to explain that not all English Protestants were of the same denomination and that in fact I felt closer to

Catholicism than to the C. of E., but to Mme de Moor this was idle sophistry. However, she had permitted the intrusion. It was a big, new church, quite full. Mme de Moor and Noémie wore black lace mantillas. A number of faldstools in the second row bore their name engraved on silver plates.

Outside church, there was much social behaviour. Mme de Moor and Noémie went home with friends. Michel and I, with others, drove to some place at a cross-roads in the Forest, where we sat outside drinking a mixture of vermouth and blackcurrant liqueur, with ice and soda. Even Michel drank this. Perhaps, after Catholic righteousness, he felt it wrong to thirst for a Protestant thing like whisky.

A bit shaky about the colours of horses. Most white horses, I know, are greys. I'm told that a pure Arab can be called white, but, although I can tell a beautiful horse from a utilitarian one, I'm not sure when the beautiful horse is all Arab. At any rate, it was on a sort of cream, whitish horse that a girl with fair hair streaming came gloriously to the end of the *piste* and then, reigning and turning, saw us and guided the beast delicately across. She walked him round while she shook hands from the saddle, took a sip of *vermouth-cassis* not from Michel de Moor's glass but from mine, then was across the road again and into a gallop along the far *piste* in no time, hair streaming.

That same afternoon, I saw Arlette in a frock (a white frock, with some kind of iris or lilac pattern). She was of a nice height, small-footed, slim-legged, the head perhaps a bit large (but that, after all, is womanly), the shoulders not narrow, but the hands slim, well-

cared-for and soft, the elegantly trimmed mane of fair hair soft. I recalled the few young English horsewomen I had met, big-jawed, square-fingered, slangy, not unpleasant girls by any means but horribly confused about this and that. I am no judge of the matter, but I should think Arlette rides superlatively well. Heraldic on horseback, on her feet she is quite in her right mind. At this particular moment, I refuse to speculate upon her in other positions.

Here I am, on my fourth floor. It is a fortnight since I saw Arlette. The bed-covers are neatly turned down. After dinner, I shall go the the Aubette to hear the Calvet quartet with Gérard Souzay. My palm is pink with Jeanne's rump, but my fingers hold a pen. I am concerned with travelling Atha. In effect, it is the end of February.

Though he knew other parts of France, Atha had never before been in Paris. So far as I can calculate from his accounts of the matter, he quitted the place within thirty-six hours, yet not because of any previous arrangement. To anyone who loves Paris, this must seem incomprehensible. The reasons he proffers seem to me quite unsound.

It is, of course, true that the end of February (or the beginning of March) is not a well-chosen time for a first glimpse of Paris, though it seems that the weather, if cold, was clear and exhilarating. The Dieppe trains come into St. Lazare. Benedicta King parked Atha at a hotel near the station. St. Lazare is also the station for Puits-de-la-Lisière, and to me it is rather an elegant station, though I do see that to one side there is a row of somewhat inelegant hotels, and I do see that, even

at the age of twenty-four and however hard-up I might be, I should not much have cared to stay at any of them. Still, that is a trifling matter.

There were, in the rucksack, a number of letters of introduction. That same evening, after an excellent dinner at the price of seven francs including wine, reasonably well-connected Atha boldly introduced himself to all the complications of the *Métro* and attempted to deliver one of these letters, addressed to a wild and powerful American expatriate writer. He failed, because this writer had just gone to London.

Next day, he met Benedicta in the afternoon. He recalls standing with her at the back of a 'bus which passed Notre Dame, afforded him a glimpse of the booksellers' boxes on the quays and presumably went up the Boul' Mich'. At about six o'clock they joined Michael King at the Café de la Paix, but that did not last long. When Benedicta called for him at his hotel the following morning, she was told that impulsive Atha had packed up, paid and gone the previous evening.

HE SAT ALL NIGHT SLEEPLESS IN THE CORNER OF AN otherwise empty second-class compartment. In the false dawn, he saw white mists swirl curiously away from the train as it battered its way across the plain.

This was the hour at which spies might have been expected to be abroad, but none of the *gendarmérie* approached him. It was dark in the enormous station square, but on the island in the middle there were

lights in some kind of all-night refreshment room. Frozen Atha had coffee and a roll.

It was still dark outside. He bore left past the Hôtel des Vosges and turned up the Rue Kuhn. Had I been here at the time and already awake, I might well have heard his steps in the street, for there were no trams yet running, and the first bell did not sound until he had crossed the Ill and, by way of the Old Winemarket and the Place Kléber and the Arcades, was very near the Minster.

It reached up into the darkness above him, 'a darkness within darkness, . . . long, long prisons of stone'. Not-yet-unconverted Atha had none of D. H. Lawrence's thoughts on that early Sunday morning in a cold February. As a boy, he says, he trembled with rage and frustration when his card-castles fell.

He passed beneath the shadowy arch of the wise and foolish virgins. Their smirking or downcast lineaments were invisible to him. At a small altar in the south aisle, mass was already being said. The altar was backed by a life-size painting of Christ as the Good Shepherd, a pastoral crook in his right hand, a lamb under his left arm, others about his sandalled feet. The outlines of the whole were picked out with fairy-lamps. Atha shuddered, though he remembered Fr. Arbuthnot saying that the horrors of repository art were not legitimate obstacles to faith. He had conceded the point.

Further east, beyond the boot-soles, the purple-vested priest, his sleepy choir-boy and the religious art, the astronomical clock whirled faintly in the shadows. Atha left the group of faithful before the altar and walked out into the paling darkness.

In the Breuil, the lime-trees were not yet budded. Before the mayor's house, shadowy on the left, stood the figure of Rouget de Lisle, who there composed and first sang the *Marseillaise*, a spine-chilling song for the Army of the Rhine, who, being Alsatians, marched into Germany singing it in German.

He now had the municipal theatre on his right hand. This is closed at present. From playbills still adhering to one of those cylindrical structures (at the other end of the Place Broglie) to which we seem to have no equivalent and for which therefore we probably have no name, the season finished with a Jouvet company in Molière. Earlier, young Harold saw a *Tales of Hoffmann*, a Parisian farce gabbled so fast he recalls catching only such aphorisms as that every husband in Paris has a mistress and some rather dubious jokes about the Polish corridor (the husband in question had a Polish mistress) and a performance in German of Strindberg's *The Father*, with Paul Wegener. Harold is not yet well-acquainted with feminine geography. The young ladies of the ballet in *The Tales of Hoffmann* wore, it seems, grey tights without any form of *tutu* or apron, and Harold was at once appalled and enchanted by the spectacle of so many plump, cloven bottoms running about the stage. Lugubrious Atha did not so much as look at the playbills.

I had always supposed there were nine Muses. Only six stand, each topping an Ionian column in red stone, before the municipal theatre, a German building, the original theatre having suffered from the bombardment of 1870 (this from the guidebook). Atha would no doubt glance up at the Muses. He then crossed a canal, walked

purposefully, though without haste, along the Avenue de la Marseillaise and, by way of the Pont Royal, left the medieval, islanded, predominantly French or autonomously Rhenish old town and came to wide avenues, open squares and all the ponderous monuments of the first period of German rule, none more ponderous than the pale-grey university.

The statue of Goethe is grey. Across the red-stone base of the Pasteur memorial fountain, somebody had painted in huge, ragged, red letters:

VIVE REX!

Atha wondered about this. It did not seem to him to be quite the kind of political slogan one would have expected to find so prominently exposed here. The square had been deserted. From the far side, a military command was shouted in French, and, as he watched, a detachment of tall Negroes in khaki uniforms and red fezzes emerged from mist under the pollarded trees and shuffled across the square, doubtless toward the barracks at the Porte de Schiltigheim.

It was almost light. The doors of the Gallia (formerly the Germania) were open. Atha pushed his way through the glass swing doors. There were no other customers yet, and many of the chairs were still upside-down on the tables. He sat at the small table normally used by Umpleby and young Harold. He looked around him and saw the Schutzenberger and Tigre Bock posters, long unchanged. A raw-boned, unsmiling, lantern-jawed, clean-shaven waiter appeared. Atha ordered a *complet*.

'Where is Paul?' he asked.

'Paul, *monsieur*?'

'There was aforetime a boy who called himself Paul. . . .'

'There are no longer boys who call themselves Paul, *monsieur*. There are those who call themselves Maurice, Carlo and Robert, and there is one, a French of the interior, who calls himself Yves. As for me, *monsieur*, I call myself Albert.'

'You do not recall to yourself any Paul?'

'But no, *monsieur*.'

'It was a small boy, mince and frail,' said Atha. 'He carried a species of moustache, in colour yellow or sooner orange. He was at the time gay and melancholic. He spoke frequently of his family and repeated constantly, "*La vie est dure, et les femmes sont chères*."'

'No, *monsieur*, we are not phenomena like that, we others. Paul is without doubt dead. As you describe him, he has the air a little phthisic, if not even degenerate. He coughed perhaps in speaking of his family?'

The little dialogue achieved itself. Atha broke his roll and plastered butter on one bit, pushing it into his mouth. Albert left him.

Atha, bemused, sat facing the inner room, reserved for residents. He looked to his right, at the window seat where a honeymoon couple, students married to each other, had once sat embracing over breakfast. He turned to his left and again contemplated the Tigre Bock and Schutzenberger advertisements. He half-turned his chair and looked over his shoulder at the Bulgarians' table, towards the door. He shivered. He poured out coffee.

He walked across to the picture-postcard stand,

selected two cards, showed them to Albert, who, at the sound of footsteps, had showed his nose again, and returned to his table. One card showed the Minster spire, the other a stork's nest. Atha addressed this one to Benedicta King, explaining his sudden departure from Paris.

It was almost nine o'clock. Mme Willm should be up by now. A strap of the rucksack over one shoulder, Atha walked along the Quai Koch and through the Contades, by the bare trees, the bandstand, the long glass front of the restaurant. The street door in the Place de Bordeaux was shut. He rang the first-floor bell.

Fritz Willm appeared in a dressing-gown, a man in his thirties, sharp-faced, wearing spectacles, but broad-shouldered, deep-chested, short-necked, so that his strength might have been taken for a deformity. They went upstairs. Mme Willm was away, staying with relatives at Mulhouse. In what had been young Harold's room, Jean was sleeping off the *bombe* or *noce* he had made the night before, Saturday. Fritz made coffee. He and Atha sat drinking it before the brown, porcelain stove.

No, there had been no letters. Yes, the *estomac* and the *névrose* were unimproved. Things went badly. The Willms could no longer afford a *bonne*. There were no lodgers or mid-day eaters. The Swiss vice-consul had gone, and the German consulate-general had adopted a new policy. As Fritz Willm said this, his eyelids drooped, and he raised a hawk nose. He looked Jewish. Atha supposed he was Jewish, despite fair, straight hair. That would account for the withdrawal of German consular staff.

Until Mme Willm came back from Mulhouse, Fritz said Atha could stay. In due course, Jean rose and washed away his hangover, a big, puffy youth with horn-rimmed spectacles atilt upon his nose and the wet butt of a hand-rolled cigarette stuck to the lower of his two fat lips.

Fritz was out to lunch, his afternoon occupied with some erotic duty, the prospect of which appeared to give him no pleasure. His Sunday afternoons were spent with some widow or with a nursemaid picked up in the Orangerie. Atha went out with Jean, who had friends to meet. They drank and finally ate. Atha went to the station and caught a slow train to Sarrebourg.

The February sun came out and burned through the windows. Peasants in wide-brimmed black hats or huge knots of black ribbon shuffled in discomfort upon the ribbed, buff-painted seats.

The Rue des Remparts rose steeply out of the town. The house stood at a corner. A lane descended even more steeply, no doubt to some river. Annelies was out with her *fiancé*, the owner of a hotel in which she now worked as receptionist. She would not be back until after the last train had gone. Atha had seen photographs of Annelies's widowed mother, but had not met her before. She was not very old, darker-haired than her daughter. She seemed well-disposed. No doubt Annelies would write.

IN THE MORNING, UNCERTAIN ATHA WALKED IN THE leafless, cold Orangerie. The pollarded limes on the

deserted café terrace seemed unbudded. They were black, barbaric candelabra. No boats plied on the lake. In the grotto, the pale-grey stone of the sphinxes, faintly mottled with dry lichen, stood in the bald light without shadow or mystery. The few drops of water were melting ice. In the afternoon, he took a slow, empty tram out through Neudorf and up the long ramp to a point just short of the pinnacled Kehl Bridge.

The German customs house and passport office stood on the bridge. A brisk officer took every penny and franc of Atha's money from him and gave him a receipt. The Rhine was in spate. It raced along, whole trees and great swathes of grass on its tossing, icy surface, chequered olive and jade.

In Kehl, the main street had been renamed the Adolf-Hitlerstrasse. In the shop-windows, swastika-stamped notices assured indifferent Atha that business there was conducted wholly by and with Aryans.

It was already dusk. As the lights came on, Atha saw one sad little storm-trooper, a family man or an elderly bachelor wearing *pince-nez*, glad perhaps of an excuse to get out in the evening. He stood at a street corner like a stray dog and sniffed the evening.

Back at the Willms', no letter stood on the ledge over the brown porcelain stove. Atha went out to dine at the glass-fronted restaurant on the Contades.

Then he walked to the Place Brant and took a tram out to the Rhine again. He turned left and came to the port where black water slapped against the sides of barges.

It appears that he stared for a while at this black

water. The next thing he distinctly remembers is sitting in a café, where also a number of workmen were drinking. It may have been the same café-restaurant at which, on a Sunday morning, I recently ate Rhine sprats. On this occasion, it was cool shade away from the blistering sun. To February Atha, it had been brightness and warmth out of the cold, agitated dark.

His mind had undergone a partial black-out, though he seems to recall leaving the black, comparatively still barge-water for the near bank of the open Rhine, icier and less easy simply to drop into but irrevocable and slower to yield up its corpses. For, at dinner on the Contades, it had emerged clearly into Atha's mind that his purpose in coming here was suicide. He had thought of this as the happy place, but he had also thought of it as a place in which he could disappear, whether by way of the great, unswimmable river or from high up the tallest of all Gothic spires known to him.

For the moment, a protective amnesia had intervened. A letter from Sarrebourg might yet come in the morning, the renewal-of-happiness dream be revived, the other postponed. No letter stood on the Willms' mantelpiece in the morning. After crossing the Contades and turning along the Quai Koch, white-faced Atha crossed a bridge to the central island by St. Stephen's and the statue of a boy luring titmice and, through narrow streets, came out by the north porch of the Minster, where St. Lawrence toasted on his gridiron, and continued to the open square, turned left past the west front with all its portals and statues, turned left again and yet again through a small, rounded

arch and up five or six steps to a *guichet* at which he bought the kind of ticket which now costs twenty francs.

To the main platform, there are three hundred and twenty-eight echoing, corkscrew steps, rather worn, spinning (rather slowly) anti-clockwise. At a slit in the red stone, one is already above the roof of the nave, which there lies before one in all the turquoise tenderness of weathered copper, protected at every corner and pinnacle by a jungle of gargoyles dripping from nose and mouth.

That morning's Atha did not count the steps. He made angry fun of me for counting them this morning. It was, he gave me to understand, the kind of thing that only a journalist would do. As a matter of fact, he is right. I do not quite like the way he spits out the word 'journalist', for I doubt whether I should be here at all were it not for *The Examiner*. However, I *am* here in part as a journalist. If I were not, I should not have counted the steps.

As I did this morning, he passed through a wooden shed containing lavatories, little store-rooms for brushes, pails and mops, a souvenir counter and a post office (though perhaps, at that time of year, these last two were closed). It is the south tower one has climbed. The spire rises from the north tower.

From the platform, the view to the ground is already vertiginous. The tiny people walk there like seraphim without bodies, their legs waving feebly to and fro beneath them. I am not much prone to giddiness, even now. The Hon. Bert, happening to glance down, clutched my arm and closed his eyes. He must, he said, go, but

I must not think of coming down with him. I could see how lines which to my eyes were merely vertical or horizontal tilted drunkenly across his mind.

Everywhere, there are names scratched and chipped in the stone. It is a hard stone, little defaced by weathering centuries. The pinkness, on which, I fancy, I have already sufficiently insisted, is by no means uniform. In later buildings, and conspicuously in the eighteenth-century Prefecture, the builder has sought homogeneous stone, often the lightest and so the most radiant pink, but, among the vast quantities of stone in the Minster, itself a whole mountain of stone, so that building it must have emptied quarries and laid hills low, there is everything from chocolate to dove-grey, various tones of red or pink merely predominating in the mass. The base of the spire, a vaulted chamber invisible from the ground, shows almost no colour. The names there are deeply chiselled. Now you must hurriedly do what you can while the attendant's back is turned, but in earlier days it is clear that the name-chipping on fashionable Gothic was never improvised.

'You left servants behind,' says the Hon. Bert, 'or perhaps a resident stonemason plied for hire.'

The name of Voltaire is half-defaced. 'Mme la Dauphine' was Marie Antoinette, who stayed here on her way to the French marriage and was entertained with a picnic on the Minster platform. Goethe was here at the time. His name occurs twice, once externally and once under the vaulting, in both cases with a list of his boarding-house companions, including Herder. Both entries are dated 1776, five years after the close of the Sessenheim idyll and Goethe's first departure,

six years after the visit of Mme la Dauphine, on her way to play at shepherdesses.

It is a pity Hon. Bert could not look steadily down upon the roof-tops. They are not pink, but brown and cream. A shower in the night had washed them clean, and the overcast sky made near things luridly clear. They are very steep roofs. If a monk's fine, praying hands suggested the Gothic arch, these are the domestic but urgent prayers of broad, peasant hands. They were drawn and engraved by Gustave Doré, and much else in his drawing seems to conceal the image of their crowded, imbricated forms. In each roof, there are three, four, even five storeys, each with its row of attic windows projecting not horizontally but at a downward slope, so that snow would scarcely hold even there, or hold long. The chimney-stacks are topped with flat platforms on which, no doubt, it was hoped that storks would build. This year, there seem to be no storks in the town. Looked up to from the street, these roofs are lovely. Looking down upon them from a fair height, even the hardened Asmodeus may yet pause to dash a tear from his demon eye.

But now you climb higher. Two hundred and seventy-two more steps, five hundred in all. This morning, there was quite a strong wind. At each long slit, the wind pulls at you. You pass the great bell. You hope it will not ring just now (you remember how the great bell of Sacré Coeur lifts you out of your seat at a café table in the Place du Tertre). You are above all bells.

You come out into the open, on top of one of the four delicate external ('free-standing' is, I believe, the

architect's term) *tourelles* (but, of course, they cannot stand quite so free as pillars). This, I suppose, is the upward limit of 'the lantern'. By a walk which is a kind of gutter with parapet (you edge sideways along it), the rounded bays of the *tourelle* tops connect with each other. Above your head now rises what Goethe's translator calls 'the neck' connecting you with 'the nob or crown' (which is what, I suppose, my guidebook calls 'the helmet'). I must look up that quotation* again and show it to the Hon. Bert or, if I can't find a *Dichtung and Wahrheit* here, send it to him later from England.

You can't now climb beyond this point. There is an

* This is how it in fact goes, in its Victorian translation: 'I had to fight, both inwardly and outwardly, with quite different circumstances and adversaries, being at strife with myself, with the objects around me, and even with the elements. I found myself in a state of health which furthered me sufficiently in all that I would and should undertake; only there was a certain irritability left, which did not always let me be in equilibrium. A loud sound was disagreeable to me, diseased objects awakened in me loathing and horror. But I was especially troubled by a giddiness which came over me every time that I looked down from a height. All these infirmities I tried to remedy, and, indeed, as I wished to lose no time, in a somewhat violent way. In the evening, when they beat the tattoo, I went near the multitude of drums, the powerful rolling and beating of which might have made one's heart burst in one's bosom. All alone I ascended the highest pinnacle of the minster spire, and sat in what is called the neck, under the nob or crown, for a quarter of an hour, before I would venture to step out again into the open air, where, standing upon a platform scarce an ell square, without any particular holding, one sees the boundless prospect before, while the nearest objects and ornaments conceal the church, and everything upon and above which one stands. It is exactly as if one saw oneself carried up into the air in a balloon. Such troublesome and painful sensations I repeated until the impression became quite indifferent to me, and I have since derived great advantage from this training, in mountain travels and geological studies, and on great buildings, where I have vied with the carpenters in running over the bare beams and the cornices of the edifice. . . .'

iron grating, how recent I don't know. Neither young Harold nor cold-weather Atha remembers it, but perhaps that isn't strange. In my journalist's rôle, I have a note here which clearly indicates that it wasn't there a hundred and fourteen years ago.

JAMES AND ELIZABETH WATSON
PANTON, RICHARD AND EDWARD COBBETT
THOMAS COOK
1834

It still looks professionally chiselled. As you read through the grating, you feel you ought not to be looking upward, the space there being so largely occupied by the rustle of Mrs Watson's skirts. Intrepid young woman.

The map in the guidebook comes to life, though you must edge along from one *tourelle*-top bay to another to get it whole. From the south-east bay you look down upon the nave of the Minster. The dull shapes far out to the east are the Black Forest. The faint gleam in front of them is the Rhine. From the south-west bay you look down into the Minster square, before the west front. The tiny, walking seraphim are three hundred and fifty feet below. In the distance here, there is little to see but a prospect of industrial suburb, with brewery and tannery chimneys, but it is clear that you are upon an island. The avenues and squares surround it, to the north-east a park, the Orangerie. As you move round the bay to the right, you see the sharper, more dramatic line of the near Vosges.

The north-west bay has a clear drop on two sides, either into the Minster square or into a narrow street.

A jump into the square would land you in front of the north door of the west front, somewhat to the left (looked at from outside). To either side of the door stand four stone ladies in long tunics and crowns, each in her separate niche, each resting the point of her spear on a squirming Vice. None of the eight Virtues (there is another round the corner) seems particularly interested in what she is doing, though one in the right-hand group who is very plain (some burgess's wife of the time?) looks as though her long indrawn chin might be sitting on a horrid chuckle. The two girls on the extreme left are the prettiest and most charmingly posed, their expressions of a perfect amiability. No doubt the sculptor carved these first and thereafter asked his older models for a little more expression.

All nine are 'living' enough (the one on her own *looks* a bit left out). It is not difficult to imagine their reactions to the sudden descent of a male human body. The two pretty young things on the left would be nearest. Both their spears would clatter to the ground (some ten feet below). The first would stand pop-eyed with hand to mouth, the second, after looking about her to see whether at this height it was safe to faint, would clutch nearby ribs of stone and stand shrieking, 'Daddy!' The lean, plain, humorous, warm-hearted third would use her spear to get down to the ground and calculate sharply what she could do to help. As nothing directly helpful would be possible, she might then be sick.

And so on. But idle fancies of this kind were not in the mind of Atha, aged twenty-four, in late February, while even his calculations as to height lacked the precision of mine. He did not fancy the side-street. The

choice from the north-east bay was side-street and nave, from the south-east bay nave and platform, from the south-west bay platform and square. The best views (of Black Forest and Rhine) lay to the east. The drop to any part of the nave was greater than that to the platform, and the act itself would be more likely to escape observation. But that turquoise surface sloped. One could not hit it squarely at right angles and be sure. As a solid surface to be confidently met at right angles, the platform was ideal, and the drop looked adequate (it is just over a hundred and thirty feet). There were, moreover, no awkward projections on that side, the most awkward elsewhere being at platform level. To land on the platform seemed a bit squalid, however. The pails, brushes and mops were just too handy. A full drop to the ground would have more poetry about it. If brought off to perfection, it was also more certain. Atha had even read somewhere that, in falling from a great enough height, a man would be dead before he reached the ground.

Atha decided on the south-west bay and on that side of it which faced the Minster square. He looked over the parapet. The projections below were intricate and no doubt more considerable than from so far above they seemed. A great leap would be needed to clear them. It would not matter so much if one struck some projecting edge a glancing blow which then bounced one's body further out, but it would not at all do to be caught and to hang there, perhaps with a thigh-bone already driven through one's liver, but conscious. It would not be easy to make a great leap. One had to stand on the narrow parapet, whose upper surface was

lightly curved, and there was no handhold against which to steady one's balance, nor any means of getting one foot placed well behind the other and thus first swinging shoulder weight back. It was not even very easy to get on to the parapet, which projected towards one from awkwardly shaped footholds among the carved lozenges of stone. One might trip and simply tumble over, quite helpless. Apart from the greater likelihood in that case of the most unattractive of imaginable physical consequences, that would be undignified. One's fate would have been taken out of one's hands. One would have been deprived of the last act of will.

With the side of his clenched fist, Atha beat upon the cold, rough, quartz-glittering pink stone. The heavy charge of adrenaline in his blood made his knees tremble. He looked at the distant Vosges, then addressed himself to what had to be done. With his left hand, he gripped the outer edge of the parapet, with his right hand the edge that lay towards him. His left heel found a hold among the carved shapes below. Necessarily leaning back a little, he took all his weight on braced left leg and flexed left arm and raised his right foot from the ground, to bring it up and place it on the parapet. No doubt his breathing was rapid.

From below came the sound of climbing steps. Then they were out in the open, and the intruder was edging his way from north-east to south-east bay and round towards an Atha who stood as though raptly contemplating the landscape, though his knees almost visibly shook.

A voice said:
'*Schön, nicht?*'

It was a young man, with open-necked white shirt and leather jerkin, fair hair loosely waving, in height an inch or two shorter than Atha, pale-complexioned but stocky. With all the dreadful, checked strength of his overcharged bloodstream, Atha was hard put to it not at once to lay hold of the intruder and bundle *him* over the parapet. Instead, he contrived by facial expression to intimate that he did not understand German.

The young man knew some French and a few words of English. It quickly transpired that Atha was neither French nor local Rhenish. The young man ventured to explain that all that lay about them was German land. Atha did not take him up on this. The young German came from Lübeck. He was on holiday. That summer, he was going to the Olympic Games in Berlin.

‘We shall show them,’ he said.

‘You mean,’ said Atha, ‘that you will win all the events?’

The German had a sense of humour. He laughed.

‘Perhaps not all,’ he said, ‘but many. We are a folk of great athletes. We are not any longer degenerate like the French. . . .’

He looked sideways at Atha, as though he would have liked to add:

‘. . . and the English.’

But, evidently, he thought better of it.

As Atha left him, the young German turned.

‘Is beautiful,’ he said, ‘this German land.’

Back in the Place de Bordeaux, a letter for Atha stood propped on the Willms’ mantelpiece, over the chocolate-coloured porcelain stove.

THIS MORNING, IT WAS I WHO TOOK MY DEPARTURE IN something of a hurry. On Atha's face, I felt sure there remained an expression indicative of his distaste for my journalistic preoccupations.

These notes on the astronomical clock are what I was on my way down to make. It goes through all its motions only once a day, at noon or, rather, at two minutes past noon. I had five hundred steps to go down. I had to leave the Minster by one door and go in at another, where I must again pay, the main part of the building being closed shortly before mid-day. Besides, I seemed to remember that the big bell did some tolling about that time, and I did not want to find myself passing it then.

Going down the *tourelles*, you hardly know where to let your eyes rest. At every long slit, if your gaze turns where it will, the streets reel below you. On the other hand, if you keep your eyes on your feet, the tower itself spins with you inside it.

You are safe. You have passed through the low, wooden shed again and are descending the south tower, three hundred and twenty-eight steps. The wind has dropped. Your steps echo. You pass other people mounting, girls with French or American soldiers. The great bell is tolling overhead. Somewhere inside the Minster, the organ is being played with evident virtuosity, perhaps the advertised organist Grunenwald practising for his recital.

As you emerge into the square opposite the Palais des Rohan, the street clocks are already chiming, but there is no cause for alarm, the astronomical clock is two minutes slow.

Its mechanism whirrs as you push your way in among the other gapers. An impressive, bearded guide, in a skull cap and long robes, bearing a staff, is already giving tongue.

The first chimes. The interval is a minor third, the upper note sounding close and the lower somewhere behind the great face of the machine, which rises almost to the roof. To the left, a brass dial behind glass shows you the moveable church feasts. To the right, a similar mechanism gives you the position of the planets. There are rails to prevent you touching anything, and indeed you stand as far back as you may, so as to see the figures passing overhead and, highest of all, the cock which will crow three times and beat its wings.

In a curious French which is either local or Swiss, the guide declaims:

'La mort qui sonne!'

It is the first stroke of twelve. A skeleton strikes the model of a bell, which makes a wooden, tapping sound at the same time as there sounds a clear ringing chime from elsewhere. A figure passes in front of the skeleton, and another appears, waiting for the next stroke. The best, however, is reserved until the hour has struck.

The guide intones:

'Les apôtres passent devant le Christ!'

He points with his staff, and, it is quite true, Christ standing in a niche above the skeleton makes signs of the cross and blesses twelve apostles who click shuddering before him.

And now:

'Le coq chante!'

Yes, the wings are raised and lowered three times.

They make the sound of a flapping handkerchief. The beak opens. The sound, in cock-a-doodle-doo rhythm, is like that produced by the 'musical submarine' you hummed through as a child (it was made of tin, and a little disc of parchment or tissue paper was held in place under the funnel). Air is no doubt mechanically blown over a vibrant membrane.

That's all. The guide switches off a light, and the crowd disperses.

Before you follow them, look at the beautiful *pilier des anges*. Above the four evangelists, four angels with trumpets are blowing up the Last Judgment. Above them are Christ and three more angels bearing the instruments of His crucifixion. The draperies are thin, the faces gravely quiet like those of rested children. The lines of the wings enclose all, like the petals of a water-lily or magnolia. There is no weight, no urgency. The eye dwells upon these upward convolutions without fatigue.

AT OBERNAI AND OTROTT, THE CHARABANC DRIVER stopped his vehicle and pointed out storks' nests, the old gates of villages which had been fortified towns, renaissance wells in drowsy market-places. The monastery of St. Odile stands at three thousand feet. The hill is surrounded by a pagan wall, and the regional poet, who is a disciple of Rudolf Steiner, argues that the saint's miraculous recovery of sight means that she was an initiate recovered from the spiritual blindness of orthodox religion.

Other charabancs are lined up in the road outside the gates. The chapel is decorated in the same kind of modern, gilded *kitsch* as Sacré Coeur or Lyons' corner houses. In the precincts are blue letter-boxes and men's lavatories. Since tourists come daily in hundreds, the life of the nuns can hardly be one of strict contemplation. They must have a duty roster at the souvenir and postcard counters, for instance.

From a raised garden, there are spectacular views. Various placed are semi-circular maps of fixed orientation. By directing your line of vision from their centres, you may discover the identity of any object in sight. On a clear day, the Minster spire is clearly visible, thirty miles to the north-east. This afternoon, the heat-haze made it uncertain whether you saw a spire or not.

Somewhere beyond the nearer pines and firs, there was artillery practice. First, we heard the shell lamenting overhead, then distantly the sound of the gun being fired, a sound like that of a door being shut.

I asked young Harold about the Orangerie girl.

'I must be psychic,' he said. 'It rained, you'll remember, on Sunday afternoon. I didn't go out. Neither did Umpleby. We slept. Suddenly, I woke up. I knew if I went straightaway to the Orangerie, I should find her. I knew exactly where she'd be sitting, and she was. It had stopped raining. There was a friend with her, another girl from the commercial school. We left the Orangerie and walked along the canal by the *Joyeux Marinier*.'

'The friend, too?' I asked.

'Yes, she's a plain girl. We're all going boating at

Robertsau to-morrow afternoon. I'm taking Attila for the friend. You know, the terrible Turk. He says he can row.'

Attila, the Turk, had just bought himself a powerful motor-bike, which it appeared he drove without licence or much knowledge of the mechanisms involved. He and young Harold (on the pillion) were proposing to do some widespread mountain excursions the following week. Attila was very keen to go to Turkheim, a name, he insisted, commemorating the fact that his countrymen had overrun the whole of this area in the eighteenth century.

The road back lay through Hohwald and Barr. As we descended in low gear into the vineyards, combed over plain and foothills, I heard, against charabanc engine, scattering stones and the exclamations of our neighbours, young Harold several times catch his breath, presumably at the beauty of the scene, which, I am bound to say, made my own eyelids prickle, my lips stay foolishly parted. Roadside calvaries were juxtaposed with vines growing on crossed stakes, the crucified Dionysus. The pale soil of this plain is incredibly fruitful. They say, if you merely scratch it with a stick, crops shoot above your head.

Along the roadside, cherry trees are planted. They belong to the commune, and different families pick them each year.

THE KING'S BIRTHDAY PASSED OFF VERY WELL. THE consul, though painfully English, is utterly charming,

and the archbishop in puce gloves was beautiful. There were a number of handsome, friendly young women in hats, among whom I talked longest with a blandly intelligent French girl from Nancy, where she works for the British Council.

The port authority with whom I talked had a tiny flag in his buttonhole. It looked like a Union Jack, a touching expression, I thought, of his Anglophily. It was the port flag. The port authorities are, it seems, dissatisfied with British policy on the Rhine. I am held personally responsible, since, unlike Hon. Bert and other members of the resident colony, I was in England when the London talks began. I shall put all this to rights towards the end of next week. I am to take a train to Bâle and sail back here on a barge. I don't know how long this will take. On re-arrival, I am to be met by a motor-launch, which will conduct me around the port. For, in a manner which I do not understand, this inland place, more than two hundred miles from the nearest sea, constitutes nevertheless the fourth port of France. As a result of my excursion, I shall be in a position to tell England the truth about the Rhine. The motor-launch bit sounds tedious, but all the rest sounds wonderful. I shall take bathing trunks and sun glasses. Sharing the simple food of the bargees, I shall lie day-long deck-top as the green banks go by, with their intermittent castles. I must get a few Swiss francs from Erich von Stroheim.

This morning, I visited a brewery. To-morrow, I am to study *pâté de foie gras* with the regional poet. In the morning, we are to call on a dealer at his warehouse in the town. Then, with the regional poet's wife, we

are to be driven by a friend of theirs to Wantzenau, where the geese are reared. We are to lunch there. The friend is a widow. Her name is Mme Zix.

Young Harold has kissed the Orangerie girl, whose name is Annelies. It came on to rain while the two couples were boating at Robertsau. They tied up and landed in the woods. Harold kissed Annelies under a dripping willow. The 'sweet, hot lips you offered without shame' are to be celebrated in a poem. It does not appear that the plain friend was similarly kissed by the Turk, Attila, who rowed without skill and took a long time to make land.

THE ENVELOPE WAS OF A FAIRLY EXPENSIVE TYPE, OF an opaque, inwardly marbled, blue-grey paper, with grey, transparent lining. Over the point of the deep flap had been stuck a small gilt lozenge bearing, embossed, the letters A and L interlaced as a monogram. The notepaper was like that of the outer envelope, folded, with ripple edges. The handwriting, bigger on the envelope than within, was generically Continental rather than specifically either German or French in style (but rather French than German) and handsome enough without either great distinction or perfectly easy legibility. The letter read:

Cher Othon,

*J'ai été très surprise hier soir en rentrant d'apprendre
votre visite—et je regrette de tout mon coeur de ne pas
avoir été là—j'étais pour [sic] affaires à Haguenau.*

Si je savais Othon que c'est uniquement pour moi que vous avez fait ce voyage de Paris, je me ferai des reproches cruels de ne pas vous avoir répondu à la lettre, mais vous savez Othon, je ne suis plus libre je suis fiancée depuis deux mois et je compte me marier bientôt ne me reprochez rien, car c'est vous le coupable de n'avoir plus écrit—mais tout de même Othon j'aurai été très contente de vous revoir car vous êtes si gentil—et si fin—seulement je n'ai pas une minute à moi je travaille toute la journée mais vous savez Othon—si après ce que vous venez d'apprendre cela vous plairait encore de me revoir—envoyez-moi un mot et je viendrai le soir après fermeture du magasin.*

Je vous prierai de ne point venir à Sarrebourg car cela ferait des racontars—et mon fiancé est très jaloux.

Alors j'attends un mot de vous—oui ou non si je dois venir et je serai là.

ANNELIES

And there it is, on the rickety basketwork table in my hotel room, with the stacked *gauloises jaunes* and match-boxes, *La Peste* and the guidebook, the ashtray, three letters from Blod, picture postcards and stamps.

Richly aware as I am of the absurdities of Atha, I cannot honestly claim that I think he was wrong to base some expectations on the letter from Sarrebourg. The girl was to marry an older man. She was marrying

* It would be possible, perhaps even, from certain points of view, desirable, to put in a [*sic*] at several points in this letter, but it must be remembered that the girl was not French. The name 'Othon' apparently came into use as follows. Pedantically, Atha had once said that, although it was found as a surname in the north of England to-day, his name was really an Anglo-Saxon *prénom*, presumably the same as the German 'Otto'. So to this girl he became 'Otto' or its equivalent in French.

for position, her own and also that of her widowed mother. Once married, she would be faithful. Even now she was discreet. Her mother must be covering the proffered visit, had clearly taken to Atha, whose return journey was romantic, whose departure almost at once ensured discretion. Let them spend one night together and go their separate ways in the morning, each with a memorable, a charming burden of renunciation.

A note was despatched to Sarrebourg, and Atha devoted himself to the task of passing twenty-four aimless hours. He recalls very little of what he did during the earlier part of Tuesday. He apparently went to the bookshop next door to the Gallia, enquired what they had by Léon Bloy and bought a book called *Le Sang du Pauvre*, which is a high-flown diatribe against the rich.

In the afternoon, Mme Willm returned from Mulhouse, a small, dark woman, bespectacled like her two sons, her speech rapid, her eyes darting. Her manner struck Atha as totally unwelcoming. This surprised him. He could well understand that she might be momentarily annoyed at finding an unexpected visitor in the house, but, once she had expressed her annoyance to Fritz, it seemed to Atha that she might well have relaxed and viewed himself with a degree of friendliness. Certainly, whatever happened with Annelies, he would not stay to-night with the Willms.

'You permit,' he said, '*madame*, that I pay you something?'

'Yes, *monsieur*,' she said, with glinting sarcasm, 'I permit it.'

Atha was uncertain what time Annelies would arrive. He fancied there was time for him to walk across the

Contades and to the public baths and back. In case Annelies came early and he was out, he trusted that Mme Willm might be kind enough to let the girl come in and sit down for a while. Mme Willm assured him that she did not propose to ask strange young women into the house, under any circumstances whatever. Atha concluded he must wait about. Mme Willm must be in a state of considerable fury, he could not guess why.

From this point, Atha's account of his doings no longer strikes me as perfectly reasonable. The young woman had to leave her place of work and travel a distance of forty miles by train, probably by a slow train. At the earliest, therefore, she could hardly be expected in the city before six or in the Place de Bordeaux before a quarter past, and, indeed, seven o'clock would be more likely. Even with Continental time in force, it can hardly, in late February or at the beginning of March, have remained light until seven o'clock so far to the east. It must have taken a good forty minutes to cross the Contades, walk along the quays, cross the Ill and reach the *bains municipaux*, buy a ticket, run and use a hot bath, dry and dress, return to the Place de Bordeaux.

Atha must therefore have decided, not much later than a quarter past six, that Annelies was not coming, after all. There are in fact other considerations which suggest that his desire to see Annelies was less urgent than much of his behaviour might seem to pretend. No doubt Mme Willm's presence irked him. No doubt he was conscious that his presence irked Mme Willm. No doubt the appeal of a deep bath of very hot water was strong. At any rate, when clean Atha returned to

the Place de Bordeaux, he was informed that a young woman had called at the house and asked for him, that his probable movements had been indicated to her and that she had then gone away. Atha took his bundle of dirty clothes upstairs and stuffed them into his rucksack. He then left the house again.

On the cindery, trampled earth of the Contades, between the bare trees, he met Annelies returning. It was still light enough for the two to recognise each other. It was, apparently, too light for the young woman to feel that they could, with any propriety, at once kiss.

They walked by way of the Place Brant and the Arcades to the Place Kléber, the west side of which is almost wholly occupied by the enormous Café de l'Aubette. It was in the concert and banqueting hall of the Aubette that, on Tuesday evening, I heard Janine Micheau and Gérard Souzay, with a string quartet giving the first performance of a new work by Florent Schmitt, whose big-grey-bearded, cravated, black-sombroeroed, brown-corduroyed figure is still to be seen about the streets, as though it were still the 'nineties and this Montmartre.

One afternoon last week, sitting outside on the terrace of the Aubette drinking tea in the nevertheless hot shade, I caught a sudden whiff of Virginia tobacco, like new-mown hay, and heard a very English female voice say:

'Darling!'

As its owner settled beside a man, four tables away, who was reading what might have been the *Continental Daily Mail* or *Times*, the voice of the woman, swooping with parcels, continued:

'Darling, I've spent *all* our money! we shall have to *walk* back to Calais!'

The answer was, all ungraciously, a grunt, at which the wife softened her tone.

'Darling,' she said, 'I haven't *really*!'

In February, however, the awning was up, the pavement free of basketwork tables and chairs. Atha and Annelies went through the revolving glass doors and sat at a table of brass-rimmed marble. I cannot gather with certitude what 'Othon' ordered. I suspect it was simply white wine. At any rate, there the two sat, pale-faced, intense Atha, a man then temperamentally ill-equipped for seduction wearing a pale-grey jacket of Donegal tweed with a dark-blue shirt, and the girl of twenty, with soft, very fair hair over a somewhat bulging forehead, her rosebud mouth prominent, her opulent (and, I gather from snapshots, somewhat flaccid) bosom in a white jumper caught up with a belt.

Two bits of dialogue strike Atha as salient. Indeed, they are the only points he recalls distinctly.

There was some talk of international affairs, of Hitler and the Nazis, on 'Othon's' part. Annelies's comment surprised him.

'Even so,' she said, 'we are all German. . . . *Quand même, nous sommes tous allemands.*'

It may have been:

'After all . . . *Après tout . . .*'

The collocation of '*tout*' and '*tous*', of 'all' with 'all', is stylistically unattractive, and Atha's reflecting mind may have substituted a '*quand même*' for that reason. He does not, he confesses, know what the '*tous*' was meant to include, whether simply Germans in the

Homeland together with such de-naturalised expatriates as Annelies and her mother, or the people of this area as a whole, ethnologically conceived as Rhinelanders estranged from their birthright by the temporary accident of French rule, or, indeed, whether he himself might not also be included as an Englishman and therefore *nordique*. At any rate, he did not pursue the matter, though his thoughts were dark.

In due course, he raised the more important question, how the two were to spend their evening and, not to put too fine a point upon it, their night. The response to this was even more disappointing.

It was:

'If I'd known you were just after a bit of love-making, I shouldn't have come.'

That is to say, as quoted in French:

'*Si j'avais su que vous vouliez faire des amours, je ne serais pas venue.*'

From evidence contained in the young woman's letter, it seems possible that, here too, reflection has supplied a minor stylistic improvement and that what Annelies really said had been:

'*Si je savais . . .* If I *knew* that all you were after . . .'

However, the sense is the same. Inwardly, Atha's reaction was rather of anger than disappointment. As far as his 'chances' were concerned, a keen disappointment, eloquently urged to the point of tearfulness, would, beyond a doubt, have served his turn better. As he confesses he was a little inclined to do (to himself) some three hundred and fifty feet above the ground, thirty-six hours before, he might have quoted wildly:

*Qu'as-tu fait, infidèle,
Qu'as-tu fait du passé?*

There were, indeed, other passages from Musset, Lamartine and Victor Hugo, all known to and frequently meditated by Atha, which might have served equally well. The result might have been quite gratifying.

He behaved, he assures me, with formal politeness, though he does not seem to have carried it very far. The small bill paid, Annelies gracefully helped on with her coat, the two went out through the swing doors into the cold and turned left along the frontage of the Aubette. There was some poignancy and regret now. Annelies was quite pretty. Fully conscious of her body's worth, she carried herself well, head and body erect, toes carefully pointed, perhaps turned in a little, her gait perhaps a bit mincing. But the main thought in miserably raging Atha's head was that he must get away from this horrible city at once.

The two turned left again and, by way of the Arcades, came to the Rue de la Haute Montée, where frequent trams pass on their way to the railway station square. Here, indifferent Atha ('Othon' no more) left his *inamorata* and turned right. By way of Titmouse Street, the Breuil, the bridge behind the municipal theatre, the Place de la République, the quays and the Contades, he reached the Place de Bordeaux. This was the route he had followed, very much more slowly and with different thoughts, on Sunday morning, eighty-four hours ago.

As though to make amends for his mother's poor

welcome, Fritz Willm insisted on accompanying Atha to the station. They studied fares and train times. Atha discovered that, after he had paid Mme Willm, he possessed too few francs to take him as far as London. Fritz offered to lend him money which he could return through the post. Atha refused, at which Fritz, though conscience-stricken, seemed relieved. Atha booked a second-class ticket as far as Brussels. He would, he said, like to see Brussels. From there, he could write to various people in England for a loan or a gift of the necessary money. Fritz Willm said that he had never been in Brussels, but that he understood it was a beautiful and interesting city. Atha states that his principal reason for not accepting Fritz Willm's offer of a loan was that he did not wish to retain any link whatever with the city in which he stood at that moment. He was not, in any case, sure of ever getting beyond Brussels.

III

THIS TIME, I STAYED ONLY ONE SATURDAY NIGHT with the de Moors. The greater part of last month, I was put up by Alain Thomas, who is one of our authors at Matthew Latimer's. One of my authors, really. Not Matthew's cup of tea at all. His wife cooks incredibly badly. This, I fancy, is to punish Alain for not making more money and to show that it is not what she was brought up to. He does not mind. I should not have minded the constant plates of spaghetti without sauce or the occasional poached fish (also without sauce) if they had ever been served hot. But, in fact, I did not mind so very much even so. I ate out frequently elsewhere. The Thomas's flat, though untidy, is large and not inelegantly furnished. They live up the interminably winding Rue Notre Dame des Champs, about a hundred yards below the Closerie des Lilas.

Alain rather goes in for being the absent-minded man of letters. He wears *pince-nez* and a small beard which make him look more French than Frenchmen under sixty ever look now (Alain is forty-two). His father was a great man in the time of Alfred Vallette and the

Mercur. Old poets like Paul Fort and Fernand Gregh, men like Paul Léautaud, remember him as a boy (he took me to see Gregh in that seemingly remote village inside Paris, the Hameau de Boulainvillers). At the same time, he is *persona grata* at the NRF. No sign of this starting up again yet, though Paulhan talks of it. Alain took me to the first Gallimard *cocktail* of the season. That would be the last or last-but-one Friday in May. They were all there, '*toutes ces têtes d'écrivains*', as he said. I talked to Schlumberger and Supervielle. I only saw the glaring dwarf Sartre, the tall, amiable-looking Camus, like a less embittered Humphrey Bogart, Jouhandeau, still *mal vu* and publishing only in Switzerland, Gide, looking *parcheminé* but well. I was rather congratulating myself on being the only Englishman present at this prestigious assembly when I walked two young persons from *The White Review*.

I told Deirdre that I should be coming along here for several weeks.

'Oh,' she said, rather nastily I thought. 'Is that a good idea?'

I explained that for me it was.

The first Sunday afternoon, I saw the Dunoyer de Segonzac exhibition at the most upholstered of all art galleries, Charpentier's. The following morning, Alain got me up early to show me the flowers in Bagatelle. It was a beautiful morning, and there was still dew on both flowers and grass. Parties of schoolgirls, under the protection of nuns, sketched the roses and the irises.

A film unit was at work by the lake. It was a costume piece, late seventeenth century. A nobleman and a

priest, both wearing bright orange make-up, the cleric in broad-brimmed black hat and black cloak lined with scarlet, stepped down the rocks in earnest but inaudible conversation, preceded by a young man in a yellow jumper, stepping backward, who dangled before them a microphone like a carrot to entice donkeys. A long cable lay behind him, connecting the microphone to the interior of a black van. The camera-man sat in a tall chair to one side.

The shot had to be repeated several times, and it was some time before the park-keeper and a policeman would let us step over the trailing wires and skirt the black van stationed in the lane. Marvellous rhododendrons bloomed along the forest path leading uphill towards the great promenade of the Bois de Boulogne.

I saw the new Sartre play, *Les Mains Sâles*, twice. The second time, I took Alain and Marguerite Thomas. No London theatre creaks like the Antoine, which is evidently constructed wholly of basketwork. We had three seats in a box containing six. Arriving in good time, we considerably grouped ourselves so as to leave one front seat vacant. Two quiet, unprotesting young people arrived with a formidable old lady, who raised a lorgnette to the felt brim of her black hat and who bore proudly before her a Queen Mary bosom strapped up in black taffeta, to a cameo brooch upon which the lorgnette was attached by a gold chain. She insisted to the *ouvreuse* that she had been assured of three front seats. Having failed by these means to disturb our tightly wedged composure (I can't think what you do if you get pins-and-needles in one of those *loges* when

it is full and contains even the best-disposed strangers), she proceeded to comment incisively upon our generation and its *moeurs périmées*.

It would be Thursday when I established contact with Michel de Moor at the huge bank of which he is assistant manager. We lunched together that day, and I was duly invited to Puits de la Lisière for the weekend, *i.e.* for Saturday night. I took a crowded suburban train from St. Lazare and reached Puits in time for lunch on Saturday.

Noémie, Yves and Michel still lived at home. The married Roger had vacated the lodge, and this was now occupied by two American ex-Army students and their young wives, whom the de Moors had not yet come to know by sight. The servants were new. Last year, we had been waited on at table by a slow-witted, scrawny, ageless Breton called Jean, who, on occasion, would appear without collar and be (by Michel) smartly sent back to the kitchen to put it on before he served us. He had never been viewed with much favour, but was dismissed in the end for homosexual activities blatantly conducted with the gardener. A grand-niece of Mme de Moor's had observed the two men behaving curiously at dusk upon the disused tennis court.

We drank our brandy and *nescafé* on the terrace, beneath a fine red maple which repeatedly ruffled its green skirts to display purple undergarments. Michel wondered how I wished to spend the afternoon. The day was hot, and *canotage* meant first carrying a heavy wooden canoe some fifty yards from beside the tennis court to where a small branch of the Seine lapped against a kind of allotment extension to the vegetable

garden. I could think of nothing pleasanter than to sit on the vast terrace of the restaurant at St. Germain en Laye, with its breath-taking view over a bend in the Seine.

Michel got the car out, and we called round to ask the Guilloux next door if they cared to join us. Mme Guilloux, small, slight, of perfect figure and with reddened hair which exactly matched both her eyes and the jumper through which her tit-mammaries poked like venereal headlights, is a mannequin at one of the great Parisian fashion houses. The car broke down in the middle of the Forest, and Guilloux, a big, very handsome fellow in a green corduroy jacket, took charge. Though not so wholly devoid of mechanical knowledge as myself, Michel is rather helpless in such emergencies. His impulse would have been to abandon the car, walk to the nearest telephone and get another car driven out to us. Very properly, he is impatient of machines which go wrong, the sole purpose of machines being to serve human convenience.

Guilloux opened the bonnet. The carburettor was full of what seemed to be a mixture of rust and sand, deposited by an assortment of black-market petrols. The cup itself was chipped and leaked heavily, so that it was at the risk of a fire that Guilloux eventually restarted the car and drove it slowly out of the Forest and to a garage at the far end of Puits.

We stood in the garage yard. Along the road, three or four carts driven by gypsies trundled towards Paris. Perhaps ten horses and ponies of various sizes were harnessed to the shafts. Perhaps ten others, skewbald or pinto, followed or walked ahead, intermittently

nibbling at the grass banks on either side. The scene was a peaceful one.

To console the Guilloux for their ruined outing Michel proposed dinner out at a hotel restaurant in the park. It was frequented by small, plump and noisy people with expensive clothes, Alsatian dogs and markedly underbred faces. Guilloux said they were all B.O.F.'s, *i.e.* black marketeers, the initials standing for *beurre*, *oeufs* and *fromage*, all forms of dairy produce being commodities still in short supply.

Fur-coated women sat alone, smoking thin cigarettes through holders. Perhaps it was to these women that the Alsatian dogs belonged. There were also a dozen or so young men in white plimsolls and track suits of black denim caught up at the ankle. They sat on the lawn in deck chairs and then, as the dusk deepened, were shepherded into the lounge by anxious-looking men who wore shoes and ordinary trousers. Like pugilists shadow-boxing, the young men, as they moved aimlessly among the other guests and customers, now and then rose up on their toes and sketched a movement of dribbling or evasion. They were the French football team, trained to a hair (next day, they beat Scotland). These tame and harmless animals, under the perfect control of their manager and trainer, clearly aroused lustful thoughts in the fur-coated women, who, however, were also counter-attracted by the vulgar little men with too much money and a knowing look.

From the tall windows of my room, I saw lights twinkling across the Seine. That was a more densely populated proletarian suburb towards Paris.

I awoke late. Michel was cutting Mass. The bath-

room was full of steam. Downstairs, Michel, in a very English dressing gown, brown, with twisted cord, was frying an egg in a two-handled vessel made to fry one egg at a time. The napkins of the others lay beside places empty but for bread-crumbs. From a wireless set in the kitchen, there was the sound of dance-music with vocal refrains in English, the Light Programme or Radio Luxembourg.

Arlette and her younger sister appeared before Mme de Moor came back from church. It was Arlette who drove me back to Paris in the afternoon. I dislike motor-cars, on the whole, but there is something quite specially moving about the fingers and wrists of a finely bred girl (who clearly drives 'well') on the steering wheel of so dangerous a mass of hurtling, well-polished metal. Arlette has taken a job with a travel agency and has a flat half way up the hill towards Montmartre. I shall see her again in three weeks.

On Monday, I bought presents for the Thomases. At some time after ten, I went to the Gare de l'Est and found my place. The man in the top bunk was already asleep, snoring gently. I think he'd pinched one of my blankets. I had only one, a bright red, and I was cold during the night, so that I did not sleep much.

There were the pale-cream, silky oxen along the road, the houses, the crops and the Minster spire, the grey station, the two of them there to meet me, young Harold and not-so-young Atha, then Anton Walbrook, my room, Jeanne, breakfast, the parallel sheets of light through the white iron blinds, the sounds from the next room, the telephones in the small hours. At whatever time I awake, bells are ringing.

NO AUTHORS FOR MATTHEW LATIMER, ONLY POETS. *The Examiner* seems satisfied with my first piece and looks forward to reading me on the military celebrations. In the meantime, they'd take paragraphs on the local industries or the state of political feeling. I looked round the brewery which supports a literary *salon* in the Rue Goethe (*i.e.* the husband owns the brewery, and the wife runs a literary *salon*). Vats, malting floors and so on. I gather too much maize has to be used, as in the bread. No paragraph in that.

Because of the heat, too many children swimming in the Ill just in front of the Palais des Rohan terrace. Three drowned yesterday. I might try the hunting-horn society or the bee-keepers' syndicate. I had great hopes of the *pâté de foie gras* industry, but nothing much doing at this time of year.

The regional poet read his verses at the *salon*. So did a chubby little Franciscan, in brown robe, *béret*, heavy horn-rimmed spectacles and sandals. As he read, standing up, I watched his white toes wriggling under the table. Franciscans are fairly numerous in the city. The Hon. Bert tells me one of them is a good poet. That means he is published in Paris.

Not but that the *pâté de foie gras* expedition was a great success in its way. In the morning, the regional poet and I went round warehouses in the town. Stocks low. The stuff soon goes off in this heat. Then he, his wife and I were driven out to Wantzenau for lunch. The driver was a friend of theirs, a neatly made, red-haired widow, Mme Zix. Mme Zix is descended from a notable line of regional painters and men of letters. Oddly, she reminded me a little of young Harold's

Orangerie girl, Annelies, of whom, of course, I had only the briefest glimpse.

This *café national* is not too bad. The rhubarb jam runs down my fingers. One thing the English do know is that rhubarb, which has no pectin, needs binding together with apple, which has a lot. Apart from breakfast-time, the whole of this area is a gastronomical paradise, but the luncheon at Wantzenau stands out. The people in that one village have long specialised in ill-treating birds with delectable results. There must be some historical reason for this, but neither Mme Zix nor the regional poet knew what it was. Apart from stuffing geese in such a way as to give them swollen livers, they dwarf chickens. The Wantzenau chicken (which may in fact be a hen several years old) is a delicacy for one person. But also I do not remember having those thin chips called *pommes alumettes* cooked to such dry, brittle perfection. The wine was a *Gewürztraminer* of delicate fruitfulness, heavily iced.

The restaurant was cool and shady, the country roads outside shuddering with heat. It had been arranged that we should call after lunch at a certain farm, there to be shown the apparatus with which the geese are stuffed. You hold the bird between your knees, fit its beak over a steel tube, then pedal as if at a sewing-machine. You thus force ground maize into the bird's crop. But this is not the season for stuffing.

Lunch to-day, *en toute intimité*, at the Prefecture, in its way, I suppose, the most admirable large building in the place. Mme P. an old friend of Marguerite Thomas's I thought Hon. Bert seemed a bit huffy when I told

him, but admits both P. and Mme P. very nice, with attractive children.

FASHION NOTE, SATURDAY JUNE 12. THE POLICE ON traffic duty have suddenly appeared in solar topees. They have also shed their tunics and stand displayed in navy-blue shirt, white truncheon, white gauntlets the revolver holster and *casque coloniale* blanched a dazzling white. A highly successful feature of the heat-wave. Everybody likes it, not least the policemen.

I suppose General de Lattre de Tassigny duly held his military review and afterwards proceeded to the university, where the original documents of the Treaty of Westphalia, brought from Paris, were read aloud and expounded by learned gentlemen from the École des Chartes. I slept after lunch and missed all this. In the late afternoon, I passed in front of the university and observed the red carpet still lying on the pink steps, a curious colour clash and oddly forlorn. No doubt I shall pick up enough from some newspaper in the morning, and by Monday I shall be able to see the documents themselves on exhibition in one of the city's numerous museums, between the rows upon rows of French uniforms, a feast for moth and rust since Napoleon's time.

It really is terribly hot. In the hotel lift this evening, a perspiring fat man mopped his brow and told me that it was hotter here than in the Midi, as he ought to know, since he was from the Midi himself. It is a dreadful, steamy heat, though less so with nightfall.

Returning to the hotel about three hours ago, I was, however, before I reached my room, engulfed in horrible noise. There was choral singing, speech-making, dance-music. Sometimes it grew worse. It was drowned in a howling, a blasting. Then it broke off, and again you heard it distantly and undistorted. The Tannoy system wasn't working properly. This din has only just stopped. It is after midnight.

Across the road I could see rows of blue, white and red fairy-lamps, now extinguished. That is the bombed space beside St. John's, of which remains only a bare wall, with a small belfry against the sky. I had noticed advertisements for a Foire-Kermesse, to pay for the new building. I seem to remember church bazaars as being rather quiet affairs in England.

THIS MORNING, I WENT TO THE RHINE AGAIN AND bathed and lay on the spit of gravel where the Rhine proper and the Petit Rhin divide. I had a meal of Rhine sprats in the same cool restaurant, which I imagine to have been not-so-young Atha's February salvation. This afternoon, I slept again, with the iron shutters down.

Yesterday's parade (or, rather, Saturday's parade, and by the calendar I ought already to speak of yesterday morning on the Rhine and yesterday afternoon with the shutters down) has left a certain glamour in the streets. Zouaves, Spahis, Goumiers, stroll about in full regimentals. As I dined by an open window in the hotel, two strode past, 'dusk faces with white, silken

turbans framed' (if I have got it right, Milton, though I dare say the turbans weren't silk), in long white, blue-lined, hooded cloaks, sandals on their brown feet, happily arrogant, much admired (by Serge and Pierre among others).

In the over-heated concert hall, Fritz Münch (brother of Charles and principal of the Conservatoire, as their father was before them) conducted the massive Honnegger-Claudé *Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher*, with Ida Rubinstein as Joan. One sweated in sympathy with the musicians, rather than listened.

Back here, I heard much the same din from St. John's across the road. The best way of not minding seemed to be to participate, if one could. I went over.

Young people were dancing on a tiny platform, to a band consisting of drums and accordion. The only stall left sold kitchenware, the rest of the open space being occupied by trestle tables at which older people, the very young with them, sat to drink beer and the regional champagne, which is called Dopff. There were brownies, wolf-cubs and young priests. Aged, toothless grandmothers sat and smiled happily at the generations around them. I felt very close to the heart of the people, yet spoke to nobody (except in getting myself a glass of Dopff). In French and in pre-war German films, one has seen shots of the faces of old peasantwomen smiling, faces so 'photogenic' that one wondered why the cameraman bothered taking shots of anything else. Under the massed, blue-white-and-red fairy-lamps and in the flicker of kerosene flares, there were all the faces of that kind.

A small tear did in fact form in the corner of one of

my two eyes, the left one, I think. I suppose that, in essence, it was a tear of loneliness, for the aesthetic tear often turns that way. However, that corporate din is now all silent, and I am back in my room.

To-morrow, lunch at the Prefecture again, with the flautist René le Roy. Hon. Bert distinctly green-eyed. Now too much persuaded I won't let the side down.

It is almost two o'clock. People are still walking about in the street. What they are seeking is the desire to sleep. I wish I could feel it myself. Turn in, anyway.

THE WEATHER BROKE WITH A CRASH. NOT SURE WHOSE idea this trip to Upper Alsace was, Hon. Bert's or the broadcasting director's. Possibly the two conspiring to meet some half-expressed wish of mine. Certainly, luncheon at Ammerschwihr had been laid on beforehand, so that the staff were on tip-toe when we arrived a good hour late. The *châtelaine* at Osthause must also have been warned that we should call upon her in the morning. It was a first-rate idea, despite the storm.

The director of broadcasting is a Gascon. He was posted here at the Liberation to clean up broadcasting in the neighbourhood. His family are still at Tarbes. The lady to whom he refers as his 'necessity' here is, the Hon. Bert thinks, Mlle Lenepveu. His complexion is ruddy, his eyes brown, melting and salient. He speaks French with the stutter of a machine-gun. My local affections are so far chiefly shared by him and by

Mme P., a woman of great intelligence and perfect simplicity.

Like Mme Phinellius, the *châtelaine* at Osthause speaks perfect English. The *château* dates back to the last crusade. The Germans did the most extraordinarily stupid things during the Occupation. They banned the wearing of *bérets*. In the city, they destroyed the statues of Joan of Arc, Rouget de Lisle and others and would have destroyed the portly figure of Kléber if the people hadn't themselves taken it down and hidden it before it was discovered that he was one of Napoleon's generals. They rased the Pasteur memorial in the university square. They altered the names on tombstones. At Osthause, whose library contained irreplaceable treasures, they burned one volume out of each complete set of first editions.

Thunder, lightning and monstrous rain hit us as we came into Upper Alsace. I should have thought rain as bullet-like as that would be fatal to the infant grapes, like hail, but the director of broadcasting assured us that, on the contrary, it was raining wine ('us' included Hon. Bert's Irish secretary). We passed through Bennwihr and Mittelwihr, villages of which not one stone is left standing upon another as a result of American shelling. This is the area of which one used to hear on the wireless as 'the Colmar pocket'. The Gascon broadcasting director called it 'the graveyard of Alsace'. He said that, when the Americans approached Mittelwihr, a little walled paradise bequeathed us intact by the Middle Ages, it was defended by twenty-five German soldiers in all and that a whole division's artillery shelled the place flat before the American infantry

would go in after those twenty-five. I do not know how true this is, though certainly it is better to be British than American in these parts.

The people cannot leave their ruins. Vineyards are not portable. After last year's record grape harvest, the people are prosperous again, for a lot of old wine too was saved. But they have nowhere to live except their precious cellars and pre-fabricated hutments. In the rain, gangs of German prisoners and Arabs were at last clearing the débris.

It was just beyond Mittelwihr that we ran through a lake in the road. The Hon. Bert could hardly be blamed for not seeing it. Too much rain was running down his windscreen for the wiper to deal with. Pale yellow mud washed over the car, and the engine stopped dead, drowned. Hon. Bert said there was nothing to do but sit there until it dried. Director of broadcasting insisted on us getting out and drying it. We got to Ammerschwihr, not quite so badly hit as Bennwihr and Mittelwihr, but pretty bad, and ate marvellously in a temporary restaurant built of planks.

The proprietor said the director of broadcasting was wrong about the effects of the storm. It wasn't a question of immediate damage to the infant grapes, but of soil being washed away from the roots of the vines. In several places, the roads were blocked with soil washed down from vineyard terraces which had collapsed. A cellar had been struck in Ammerschwihr. A man on a bicycle had been struck and killed.

Riquewihr is intact. The rain had cleared. As we alighted from the car to look at the buildings, we were accosted by an old man who spoke copious English

with a Lancashire accent. He had been interned in Manchester at the outbreak of the Kaiser's war, the Alsatians at that time being German citizens. He invited us down to his cellar.

The trouble with drinking in cellars, if there are four of you, is that only one glass is used, so that you have to drain it each time before passing it to your neighbour. In this way, you drink an unusual amount of wine in a very short time and emerge blinking and fuddled into the sunlight.

On Friday, travel in the same direction again, but by train. It is the anniversary of General de Gaulle's first speech from London. The Hon. Bert is to address a Gaullist reunion of old comrades, arranged by a lawyer, Maître Kalb, who during the war broadcast from London as 'Jacques d'Alsace'. There is even to be a small wreath-laying ceremony before dinner. All this strikes me as politically compromising, especially for an official representative of his country like the Hon. Bert. He doesn't agree.

'Isn't,' I said, 'de Gaulle now a politician and rather Fascist in tendency?'

'If you *will* read *The New Statesman*,' was Hon. Bert's slightly huffy rejoinder.

Hon. Bert is Conservative, royalist, Anglo-Catholic (and, for all I know, classicist). On the other hand, in his reading room off Titmouse Street, he fairly displays *all* the main English periodicals, including *The Daily Worker*. He assures me that all respectable people in the Colmar area are Gaullists and with reason. To be Gaullist there is non-political.

As Saturday is my day for joining a barge in Bâle

and sailing back down the Rhine, the Colmar trip fits in quite well. The Hon. Bert further proposes to join me on this Rhine trip. We shall both take bathing costumes, dark glasses and Swiss francs. Erich von Stroheim will let me have ten Swiss francs.

THIS MORNING, I WALKED ROUND TO THE PLACE DE Bordeaux. Not much point in it, I thought. Three years ago, as soon as there were normal posts, I wrote to Fritz Willm. The letter was, as I'd rather expected it to be, returned, marked '*parti sans adresse*'. Still, I thought I'd see if any of the tenants knew anything. None did.

After lunch, I met the Jewish doctor who knows Marguerite Thomas. He'd left a note at the hotel. He took me round the marvellous hospital. Marvellous in several ways. A lot of the new, glass-walled structures I can only assume to be admirable, but the old buildings follow the line of a part of the city walls and contain some very beautiful staircases.

My guide himself had survived Auschwitz. During the war, the German medical faculty installed at the university here was heavily involved with the Struthof concentration camp. It was, as the doctor several times repeated, a small, experimental camp. Before his elevation to a larger sphere, the infamous Josef Kramer was its commandant. There he organised the first gas chambers and prepared cadavers for the medical faculty, whose head was one Josef Hirth, who is still at liberty.

A colleague of the Jewish doctor brought out and showed me the big albums of evidence prepared against Hirth's eventual trial. There were Kramer's accounts of the first gassings of women, which he observed through a specially constructed peephole. The women, for the most part Jewish, were thrust into the gas chamber naked. Kramer (or a stenographer sitting with him) noted down, second by second, their symptoms, from mere screams to the defaecation which invariably took place towards the end of the proceedings, normally brief but sometimes experimentally prolonged. There were also numerous photographs of dissected cadavers. The identity of some had since been established by the branded numbers still visible upon attached or severed arms.

My reaction to all this was, of course, coloured by a good deal of organic nausea and horror. No doubt I should have felt this equally if confronted with some cadaver innocently pickled and dissected. The doctors, to whom sights of that kind were customary, were alone capable of viewing the matter with a balanced moral displeasure. Yet we appoint juries of medically untrained minds to appraise cases in which are involved things likely to provoke organic disturbance, to which even his many years of legal training can hardly render even the judge immune.

COLMAR IS A JEWEL OF A TOWN, AND STORKS HAVE nested on top of the Burgundian-tiled pro-cathedral itself. Its Unterlinden museum houses the famous

Issenheim retable by Matthias Grünewald, always wrongly described as a 'German' painter, as well as a great many paintings by Martin Schongauer. The suffragan bishop and the commander of the garrison were present at the Hon. Bert's lecture, which he delivered very well. The colonel stayed with us, and we went to the house of another lawyer, General Leclerc's *aide* during the war, where we drank and talked until after midnight.

Hon. Bert and I thus occupied our hotel rooms for somewhat less than two and a half hours. By three o'clock, we were up again and waiting for the train to Bâle.

At Bâle, we battled through the crowded customs. At a spotless hotel, in the morning sunshine, we ate a wonderful breakfast of snow-white *croissants* with mountains of butter and lakes of fresh milk. Then we set out to find St. John's Bridge, where our instructions were to embark.

By nine o'clock, we found our vessel. It was not a barge. It was a paddle steamer. Under awnings were already sitting dozens of barge-owners and their wives and daughters, navigators of the Seine, the Rhône, the Saône, the Scheldt. At the head of the gangway, girls in Swiss national costume gave us chocolate, literature and cigars. Swiss guns fired a salute as the steamer turned about in the river and departed from the land of hard currency and perpetual peace. I put it on record that I have now spent some two hours of my life in Switzerland.

That was ten hours ago. Clearly, the Hon. Bert and I would not have needed our bathing costumes and

dark glasses, even if it had not come on to rain. It has just stopped raining.

At eleven o'clock, the steamer halted in the lock at Kembs. We disembarked and were shown over the vast electricity generator, a sort of Dnieprpetrovsk of the Rhine. It was grandiose, but wet. The dynamos hummed. We steamed.

Once more on board, we sat down under the awnings to a luncheon of trout, chicken, rum omelettes, Riesling and Mirabelle and listened to speeches on the future of river navigation. The two banks of the Rhine are identical. There are poplar trees. Every few hundred yards, there is a smashed concrete gun-emplacement. It rained. It was very cold. The awnings dripped.

We came in sight of the spire of Kehl church two hours ago. Hon. Bert and I agreed. Even if this were now the fourth port of France, he and I did not propose at the moment to float round and round it in a motor-launch and be shouted at by a man with a megaphone. We had done our bit. We deserted, at whatever peril to international relations.

Let the harbour area be 551 *hectares*, with a water surface of 133 *hectares*, 18 grain warehouses and a coal-storing capacity of 600,000 tons. Let it. Let the Rhine question remain forever unanswered. Once our feet were on dry land, Hon. Bert and I ran for the first tram. Back at the hotel, I got Jeanne to run me a hot bath and now write extended on the *chaise longue*, the pamphlets they gave me on the marble-topped table at my side.

It is dinner-time. I shall walk slowly down four flights of red-carpeted stairs. In the dining room, I

shall flirt with the two serious American girls at the next table, beneath the delighted, conspiratorial and benevolent gaze of Serge, Pierre and the old head waiter whose name is Jean.

A COCKTAIL PARTY AT THE REGIONAL POET'S. HON. BERT asked, too. Also Gascon head of broadcasting. Also Festival organiser, a doctor. Jolly, short, sensual, with a moustache. Was in England before the war, likes us, was particularly impressed by Oxford, but wonders how all those young men, obviously compelled by college regulations to do without women, manage, when they eat so much roast beef. Head of broadcasting very appreciative of this point.

Also Mme Zix. After a drink or two, very attractive. Short, broad, dyed-hair, but firm, neat figure and white skin. Again struck by her resemblance to the Orangerie girl. Forehead, I suppose, and mouth. Older, I suppose, yet perhaps not. Less than forty, I'd think, perhaps a lot less. I don't think I'd respond if she was near forty. Mme Zix is the *femme de trente ans* with complications.

This not the point, however. Not yet desperate for women. Point is Fritz Willm.

I told Mme Zix about my visit to the hospital. By what to me was a natural association of ideas, I then told her about the Willms. Jews, I said. I wondered what. I suppose I was then a bit pompous with drink.

Mme Zix laughed. She knew the Willms.

Not Jews in the least, she said. A very good Protestant family. The Willms had spent the war at Limoges.

Mme Willm was dead. Both Fritz and Jean were married. Fritz could be easily found at the railway administration.

THE HON. BERT HAS GONE AWAY FOR A HOLIDAY IN Brittany, leaving me his office to write in, a great blessing, as the weather is again poor, after a hot week-end. He is also spared rage and envy at my third invitation to the Prefecture, this time for dinner and to see the leopard cub Cornut-Gentil has sent his successor's children from Africa.

On Saturday, I went to tea at the Willms' in the new residential area behind the Orangerie. Tea consisted of ham, pineapples with kirsch and two bottles of good wine, apparently produced by relations of the Willms at Barr. We are to visit the vineyards.

The diminutive 'Fritz' was always understood to be short not for 'Friedrich' but for 'Frédéric'. The young Mrs Willm calls her husband 'Fred'. Her features are quite pretty, but pinched. She wears spectacles. Her fair complexion is admirable. Not quite sure whether she may be described without qualification as a hunchback. Fritz himself gives an impression of hunchedness. His chest is very broad, his shoulders powerful, his neck short and his head set a bit forward. This over-development may, I suppose, have taken place in the attempt to remedy an initial weakness. For all I know, Mrs Willm may also be a strong tennis player, but there is definitely a hump. In the matter of clear eyes, good skin, vivacity, there is no indication of her being

anything but physically healthy at the moment, but she strikes one as what is known as 'delicate'. One fancies she must have been very ill at one time over a long period.

I could not imagine myself being physically attracted by her. Fritz's sexual experience was always wide. He never had to make do with plain girls. There is something odd about the marriage. This is the kind of thing I don't like saying. To speculate on other people's relations with each other is vulgar at the best of times, especially if one is looking for oddities. I have no reason to suppose that the two are not happy with each other, given that Fritz is not of a happy temperament.

Mrs Fritz also works in the railway administration. She is terribly proud of her husband. Much of her conversation is an appeal to the listener to keep him safe. I tried to draw Fritz about young Harold and not-so-young Atha. All I got were references to a young woman called '*la Lithuanienne*', presumably Harold's Maria, the broken-hearted singer. Fritz did not seem to have heard of the girl at Sarrebourg. I could not pursue the subject. Mrs Fritz did not like it. She was unable to tolerate the thought of her husband knowing other women in the past, although it was not a question of his women.

I felt:

'Her jealousy is a poniard from whose hilt she never takes her fingers.'

I also felt that, much as one respected her pathos, one might never experience real compassion towards her. In some way, she invited the blow to fall. By anticipating it, she hoped that, when the time came,

she would know how to laugh it off. One knew that she would not. She knew that she would not.

Another thing I felt was:

'He has married a deformed girl so that his mother in Heaven will not visit him with jealousy and punishment.'

Of course, it is equally possible that Fritz feels himself to be deformed and that he has married a girl with the same but worse, deformity in order that they may play hunchbacked babes in the wood together. But Fritz was mother-dominated. Mme Willm was a vampire mother. In England, vampire mothers tend to produce homosexual sons. Not so abroad, where the duty to the mother is anal, economic. Still, oddities must ensue. It seems possible that Fritz Willm, able to seek handsome girls when his mother was alive (though either socially inferior or widowed), felt that only a cripple was possible after her death.

But, really, all happiness is precarious. Unless they are people of quite exceptional real strength or mere complacency, the recently married could be expected to feel and show anxiety in proportion to the happiness they have discovered. Because she is not attractive to me, that does not make Mrs Willm's anxiety less simply charming, less touching, less delightful. So far as their temperaments allow, I am sure Fred and she are happy, and I hope they remain so.

Economically, Fritz too is worried. He talks about the cost of living, and I suppose that the office-worker feels it worst here just as he does in England. The notion is that Fritz is to hire a car to take us to Barr, but of course that I pay for it. He seemed to want to

avoid finally committing himself to the excursion until he had talked to the garage proprietor. He felt, it was clear, that the price demanded might be too high and that, when it came to the point of paying, I might abscond.

He kept saying that it might cost so-and-so or even so-and-so and watching me closely to see how I reacted. Somebody must have stung him very badly at one time, for I am certain that he himself is agonisingly honest.

The weather is settling down to intermittently showery gloom. I hope it is brighter for the Hon. Bert in Brittany and for Blod and the children on Cardigan Bay. I am possessed by the quaintest thought about Blod. I want to drink sherry out of her navel. For more than ten years now, in all my happiest moments, there she has lain, old Flowerface, belly upward, that tiny cup quite unused, except once, before our marriage, when, doubtless under the influence of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, I tried to arrange violets in it, there being in the garden outside a cold frame in which these sweetest, most unobtrusive flowers bloomed in December. It would be silly with most girls. They would giggle, and the sherry would run out over the sheets. With, possibly, one quiver because the liquid is so much below blood heat, Blod's belly will be still, and I can lower my face to drink up the sherry, and she will be looking at me with those friendly eyes.

Cook's in the Place Kléber can't get me a sleeper to Paris till Friday or a place on the Golden Arrow till next week. I shall see Arlette in Paris. This evening, I am taking Jeanne to the big fair, where no doubt we shall ride on erotically stimulating roundabouts, switch-

backs and cakewalks and where I shall display male prowess by knocking coconuts out of deep cups. I was never a tremendous cricketer, though not bad at football of any kind.

On a pole fixed through this window hangs, over Titmouse Street, a Union Jack, which Hon. Bert always pulled in at sundown. I suppose the secretaries do this in his absence. They type and talk and make coffee beyond that door. Beyond them is the reading room. There are exposed all the periodicals and pamphlets and books illustrating the British way of life. Two north-country voices audible a few minutes ago at first from there and then nearer in consultation with the Irish secretary might have been those of young Harold and Umpleby but are in fact the voices of Smith and Taylor from Manchester.

FROM ARLETTE'S FOURTH-FLOOR BALCONY, HALFWAY UP the hill towards Montmartre, I look down into a sunny side-street. From a house on the other side, an old lady on a stretcher has just been carried out to a waiting ambulance. A group of children are playing some game with a ball. There have been first communions. Their brassards do not impede two boys, but a girl immobilised by her ankle-length muslin dress looks wistfully on. Arlette is engaged in cooking a *carré de porc* as it should be done.

The afternoon yawns emptily before us. An art gallery threatens. It is Sunday.

I was in Paris for breakfast yesterday. I recall the

low-grade bread and coffee at the Gare de l'Est and the unshaven young soldier already drinking *marc* at the same table.

The fairground lay in a part of the city I had not visited before. I suppose that markets are held there, or perhaps that vast concrete space is normally used as a military parade ground. Stalls, booths, roundabouts, swings and the rest were distributed in orderly formation, their lights on. It was already near dark, and a fine drizzle fell.

There is something quite particularly eerie about a deserted fairground or, rather, about a fairground fully manned but with no other customers than oneself and a companion. The attendants stood at their lighted stalls, holding out to us rifles or handfuls of wooden balls. The mechanics were to hand by the buttons and levers of motionless dodgems, cakewalks, chairplanes, dippers, walls of death. A steam organ blared, stopped, blared, faltered and stopped. I accepted a rifle butt and fired at a celluloid ball kept up by a jet of water. Jeanne aimed darts at large numbers and hit small ones. It was hard to decide whether we ought to ride on anything. We felt we ought to encourage these men faced by imminent ruin, but on the other hand it could hardly be worth their while to start up those mighty wheels and pistons for twenty francs. We twice climbed the steps of, and on mats slid down, a helter-skelter, which required no mechanical aid. In the end, we got some chairplanes started up and whirled centrifugally round, but without a surrounding hubbub of other voices Jeanne couldn't even squeal properly. The man seemed quite pleased to have two customers.

I was reminded of the Sartre film, *Les Jeux sont faits*, which I had seen in London earlier in the year. The lovers danced on an empty *café* terrace to the faint sound of an invisible orchestra. They were dead, but did not quite know it, as they whirled in slow motion round and round. Jeanne is not an imaginative girl, but I felt that it all seemed posthumous even to her. It was a bit cold in the drizzle, but that hardly accounted for her suddenly shivering as we left the big fair and made our way to a stationary tram.

Jeanne, it turns out, has a baby which she leaves with her aunt at Schwindratzheim. The father was a German sergeant. In those parts, that kind of thing met with more tolerance than it seems to have done elsewhere in France, at any rate among the working class. There was not much immediately post-war hair-clipping of young women by the neighbours. There may have been some unpleasantness with rich employers belatedly much concerned to be French. Jeanne's working at a hotel in the city has something to do with circumstances of that kind.

If I had known so much about Jeanne a month ago, I wonder if I should have got on to the same terms of teasing friendliness with her, to say nothing of the subsequent horseplay. I might not. I couldn't regret it now, of course. I am no great admirer of my own character, but I couldn't, I hope, ever be left without some tenderness for a woman I'd been at all intimate with. Still, to collaborate with the Germans was not a good thing, even in those parts, even among feather-brained young women, even with comparatively inoffensive and good-looking young Germans, even although the colla-

boration itself was of a wholly non-political nature and, indeed, not even commercial except in so far as it might result in an extra bottle of milk or half-pound of meat. As to any possible harm to one's neighbours, it might even have resulted in somebody not being arrested.

But I suppose that was not collaboration, merely fraternisation. I fancied that Annelies might have collaborated in another sense. That is why, three years ago, when I wrote to Fritz Willm and got the letter back marked '*parti sans adresse*', I did not also write to Sarrebourg and why, during the past month, I took no train there.

Perhaps I was coldly censorious on inadequate grounds. Perhaps I have been a bit bloody-minded (or lazy). Young Harold seemed to think so, when it had all been explained to him.

It was on Monday evening that I took Jeanne to the fair. On Tuesday morning, I called at the *syndicat d'initiative* kiosk in the station square, to pick up fact-containing leaflets which might help with any further pieces *The Examiner* wanted. As I left, young Harold was emerging from the station entrance, he too being somewhat half-heartedly concerned with his departure.

The scene of my arrival was, so to speak, re-enacted in reverse, except that our middle term was omitted. Although it was almost two and a half hours later in the day, the effect was helped by an alternation of cloud and sunshine. Uncertain of his next movement, Harold stood in shadow before the station entrance. I joined him. He was staring across the vast expanse of the square.

'Oh, hello,' he said.

Across the square, one of a row of hotels lay in ruins.

'You've noticed?' I said.

'Yes. That's where I spent the first two nights, before I went to the Willms.'

'There was a war,' I said.

'Yes, there was going to be a war.'

'You knew that?'

'He knew. Our middle term.'

'The pseudo-Atha?'

'He doesn't like being called the pseudo-Atha. He says, if anybody's the pseudo-Atha, it's you.'

'He didn't seem very friendly,' I said.

'He felt that about you.'

'Well,' I said, 'I'm sorry about that. It was only because I felt his disapproval.'

'I think he was afraid of you condescending.'

'He disapproved of what I was up to. He didn't like my clothes. He resented the fact that I was staying comfortably in a hotel and eating at good restaurants and meeting all the local celebrities. He didn't understand. I was paid for. I couldn't have got here at all, otherwise. I had to take a job because I have four mouths to feed. As to the natty gents' pin-striped suiting, it's my demob. suit, a present from the Army. It's the only suit I've got, apart from a dinner jacket. I don't much like it myself. For one thing, of course, clothes are rationed. Even hats. I don't like that turf hat myself. You can't nowadays "starve" in that picturesque manner. As to my hair being short, when you've got as little hair as I have . . .'

'Yes,' said young Harold, 'that was a bit of a shock.'

There he stood, in his silver-grey plus fours, the

slight reddish tinge sun-bleached out of his hair, the pale-blue eyes in the brick-burnt face looking at me with gentle, earnest puzzlement. The northern accent was strong.

'That war . . .?' he said.

He looked across the square again at the rubble-strewn gap in the row of hotels.

'I suppose it would be an American bomb,' I told him. 'At least, it was an American bomb which made that hole in the nave of the Minster.'

'You mean that the Americans and the French . . .?'

'No,' I said. 'No, wars are different now. You drop bombs on your allies for strategical reasons.'

I was made to explain, of course. That took some time.

'I remember,' said Harold, 'something about a war. I remember seeing the Place Broglie. There was a tram overturned. I looked up, The Minster was still standing. Then I . . .'

'*You* remember?' I said.

'You're not the only one who remembers!'

'All right,' I said. 'Tell me, then. What were you doing . . . yesterday, for instance?'

'Yesterday? Why, I—I . . .'

'You were doing nothing,' I said, 'because I didn't think about you. In the past seventeen years, you've lived in occasional flickers, when I had you in mind. You forget, or, rather, you haven't quite realised, that without me you don't exist.'

'And yet I do remember! I remember the tram and the spire of the Minster, and then I remember the Rue des Remparts in Sarrebourg, where . . .'

I cut in.

'Yes,' I said, 'I was at the pictures. In Rome.'

He looked at me sharply.

'And there on the screen, in a newsreel, were the two scenes you describe. There, when the camera moved to Sarrebourg, was a French 75 in action. You could see across the valley to where the Germans were firing, and there behind the gun was that house in the Rue des Remparts where Annelies's mother . . . I gulped aloud in the cinema. But wait a minute,' I said. 'You never saw that house. You were never in Sarrebourg. *He* was.'

Young Harold's pale-blue eyes registered trouble. Then he shrugged.

'Yes, that's true,' he said.

He looked at me critically.

'I wouldn't have thought you were the sentimental type,' he said.

I modestly pretended that I wasn't. Then, of course, he began to pin me down about what I'd done. I told him about the Fritz Willm letter returned marked '*parti sans adresse*' and had to admit that there had been no '*partie sans adresse*' letter back from Sarrebourg in respect of Annelies, that in fact I had done nothing about her. I told young Harold about the head-croppings of young women who'd collaborated and my feeling of certainty that collaboration would have been Annelies's line. I had to face the question whether *he*, our middle term, not-so-young Atha, would have been equally unforgiving or lazy or whatever it was, since it was only he and not I who might reasonably have felt some annoyance with Annelies and, indeed, only on

his account that I claimed to feel anything at all, *he* being, we both agreed, in a singularly unreliable frame of mind at the time.

'At any rate,' I said, 'it's too late now.'

And I told Harold about my visit to Fritz Willm's and our evening trip by car to his cousin's vineyard and the rather delightful drinking that went on there. By this time, we had crossed the station square, turned up the Rue Kuhn and were passing the hotel, behind whose restaurant windows late breakfasters and mid-morning coffee-drinkers sat. Young Harold was displeased with me, and no more was said until we came into Titmouse Street. There I pointed out to him the Hon. Bert's Union Jack drooping from its second-floor balcony. This failed to arouse Harold's interest.

In the Place Broglie, he distended his nostrils and sniffed the air.

'Too late in the summer for lime-blossom,' I said. 'Besides, I'm afraid they weren't limes.'

I got a look which began with quick fury and ended with helplessness.

'Those on that side,' I said, 'are pollarded horse-chestnuts. Those both at this end and by the theatre are plane-trees. On the terrace at the Orangerie, the trees over the tables are pollarded horse-chestnuts.'

In front of the mayor's house, I reminded young Harold, there had once stood a bronze Joan of Arc. The Germans had melted it down. In the Place de la République, there was talk of magnolias.

'Yes,' I admitted, 'those were magnolias all right.'

'They cupped the moonlight,' said Harold.

'Yes,' I said, 'I'm sure.'

In the great space in front of the university, the first thing that struck him was that the bookshop had moved to the opposite side of the square. The Gallia was intact and still, or again, the Gallia. Then he saw that, in the middle of the square, the most important landmark of all had gone. There was no Pasteur memorial fountain, with its gilded obelisk. Where it should have stood, red and gilt, against the red steps before the pale-grey university, there was only a great circle of uneven concrete, like a fairies' ring in asphalt. My regret about this was so obviously genuine that young Harold's mood towards me softened. I could almost see in his mind the image of Sonya and Cesia and Maria and Mieczyslas and the Austrian Jewish twins and Umpleby and himself grouped about that fountain on a sunny morning in late April or early May. It had not been, in itself, an object of any great beauty.

'You'll see,' I said, 'that the French have not, in revenge, taken Goethe's statue away or changed the name of Goethe Street. The French are rather less awful than the Germans.'

This last was a bit of a dig, but my companion didn't rise. (Not satisfied with that sentence. Clearly, one doesn't 'rise' to a 'dig'. I suppose the sense also is clear, but perhaps this is my cue to look out over the street again. Nothing. No first-communion dresses or stretcher-cases. And go kiss Arlette behind the ear, while discovering how far the *carré de porc* is from being *au point*. That took longer than expected, because, despite the cooking instrument in her hand, she turned to me. I love her, I think. In fact I'm sure I love her, if that kind of intelligent, resigned thing is love. I

can't believe my luck. Ten minutes. With the asparagus and the baby marrows, perhaps twenty.) Young Harold. Yes. We got on a tram to the Rhine.

'Have you got your passport?' he said.

'Passport?'

'Don't say the world has got rid of passports at last.'

'Oh, no, more than ever. But the other side is French territory now. I dare say you have to show some kind of permit to get beyond Kehl.'

'The bridge isn't there.'

'Not that bridge.'

'No shabby French soldiers this side, smart German ones that, unconvincingly ignoring each other.'

We set foot on the wooden bridge. There were concrete pillars remaining of the old bridge. The wood was hot through my soles of post-war leather. The church seemed to be the only building left standing in Kehl. No trains crossing the High Street. The church. It struck eleven.

He wanted to cross. He liked Germany, he said. (That had been the point of the 'dig', if digs have points.) I let him go. On the near side, there was something odd floating towards me. It was a human head. There were two human heads. Very strong swimmers. They pushed themselves off from a spit of land and knew, I suppose, where they would land up. Then a Swiss barge, rounding the bend at no end of a speed. Its ripples pulled at the reeds.

That evening, I saw the panther cub. They had a Minister's wife staying at the Prefecture. I cannot remember a more strictly desirable woman, and that is odd. I can see that she might have been just a short,

dark peasant woman, with good features but with a moustache and hairy legs. In fact she was a blissful creature, in, I suppose, a pale-green taffeta (not sure about taffeta and satin) evening frock, with either pale-green-and-silver or just silver evening sandals with moderately high heels and, unexpectedly, bare legs rather brown and without a trace of hair or even down, the feet very small and beautifully formed, the well-shaped, flat nails on the short toes varnished in some colour expertly chosen. There might well have been, with the supposed-underlying peasant woman, *du monde au balcon*, but one might then have guessed at a few long, dark hairs clustering about the *areolae* of the nipples. About those unexamined, presumably dark-coloured nipples, one felt sure there was no such thing. It was a queen of smooth, beige bosoms mildly concealed by pale green taffeta or heavy satin calculated by some *haut couturier* for no other purpose. And yet the eyebrows were thick and strong. There was no trace of a moustache.

The point is that the panther cub had claws. It scratched me, and then it scratched her. One understands pornographers. One only regrets that, including Pierre Louÿs, they are so crude. The delicate claws at those legs, those shoulders and that bosom, the curious *fearlessness* of legs, shoulders and bosom to the delicate, transparent claws, nearly drove me out of my mind.

The Minister's wife was staying. I could not stay. I think the Minister was of Education. The P.'s have adorably well-brought-up children. They are handsome, the daughter a younger Arlette, very fair, like Mme P., P. being dark and rather small. There is

nothing I more admire than good upbringing. I must try to bring Blod's children up well.

The human animal responds. From the beauty and simplicity of their mother's nature and manners, the young P.'s become adorable. They won't know why people love them. Of course, they are handsome. They are more handsome than their mother.

The leopard cub will become unmanageable. It is to be given to the zoo at Mulhouse. The *carré de porc*, the asparagus and the *courgettes*. Blissful, intelligent Arlette brings them lovingly to the table. I make a last-minute attempt to help.

THEN, OF COURSE, I SAW HIM AGAIN ON MY LAST WALK round the Orangerie. The clock over Josephine's pavilion struck four. Nearby stood the goose-girl statue. The gardeners were potting out geraniums.

I walked in the direction of the little zoo and the restaurant where the waitresses no longer wore Alsatian costume, then turned left along the main walk on the near side of the boating lake. Birds sang, but it was an illusion that from across the lake one heard Tauber singing:

Adieu, mein kleiner Garde Offizier . . .

The trees were very tall overhead.

There he sat on a park bench, dwarfed in the green aisle, notebook on knee, the black-and-white marbled notebook, the black pen loaded with violet ink, the knee covered with pale-grey flannel. He wrote an

immature hand, affecting the Greek ϵ . The lines on the left-hand page went:

In the water, a simple medallion
Softer clinks, where line relaxed and substance
Fall thinly starred;
Where the gaze cools and rests easily on
The crumbly round and steaming split-glance
Of a bedded moon-shard.
But onward, and between the drowse of trees
Two final lamps in the palace windows twitch
And die.
But upward, and a watcher starts and sees
A tongue of cloud creeping over . . .

I prompted him:

. . . that licks . . .

And he completed the stanza.

. . . A tongue of cloud creeping over, that licks
The moon from the sky.

‘The previous stanza’s a bit clotted,’ I said. ‘You’ll have to clean it up.’

‘Yes,’ said young Harold, ‘or throw the poem away. Those last two lines aren’t too bad. Of course, it wasn’t a palace, just the lights turned off at the restaurant over there last night. And the moon in this water just in front of us.’

‘“Steaming”?’ I said.

‘Hot day, yesterday,’ he explained. ‘At any rate, you can imagine a ripple splitting the reflection, then decomposing it.’

'Decomposing it first,' I said, 'then leaving it just split. This is good-bye, I'm afraid.'

'Where's . . .?'

'Our middle term? The authentic Atha?'

'Yes.'

'He couldn't bear it. He's gone.'

'Back home?'

'I think he meant to, but his money gave out. He's stranded . . . in Brussels.'

'That's not a bad idea.'

'At any rate,' I said, 'Brussels is full of churches. And Easter comes early this year.'

Young Harold grinned. He was clearly about to tell me that it was long past Easter and Whitsun, too.

'In his world,' I said, 'it's always Lent. The images are covered.'

'The what?'

'It's a thing they do in Catholic churches, towards the end of Lent. They drape pieces of violet and purple cloth over all the holy images.'

'Because there's a bad time coming for old Jesus?'

'That's not the way to put it,' I said. 'It's "in anticipation of the mysteries of Good Friday".'

'I like that,' said Harold.

'Of course, on another plane of time, he got back home months ago. Well, home. London. Since then, he's been staying very comfortably at two places in the country, and he's just off to a third. If he did but know just what was in store for him in the near future, he might feel a bit more cheerful. He'd certainly be surprised.'

'What's in store?'

'Oh, well,' I said, 'there's a sort of Welsh girl, with a romantic, unpronounceable name. She turns out all right. They get married within a year. Legally, I mean, within a year.'

Young Harold didn't know what to make of that. There'd been an Eirwen at Rhyl and a Gwyneth in Hinderholme just before he left. He was prepared to have views on Welsh girls, but not on marriage.

He wanted to know what was in store for him. I couldn't tell him much. I told him he'd win the composition prize. I told him he ought to work harder at the university, but he paid no attention to that. I sketched out the next few days for him.

Apart from the discomfort of nearly ten hours on an unpadded pillion, he'd have two narrow escapes on the projected excursion with the terrible Turk. In fact, if Attila didn't accidentally turn the gas off when hitting a pile of gravel by the side of a winding, ascending mountain road, young Harold's leg would be torn off. Still, it would turn out all right. Then Attila would start expatiating on Turkheim and the Turks over-running Europe and the last war and begin casting aspersions on French valour at an inn in French-speaking Lorraine, near the Petit Armand and its catacombal memories of Verdun, and young Harold would have to get him away fast if the two were to avoid being lynched. A thunderstorm would then begin travelling backwards and forwards between the Vosges and the Black Forest, and they would be drenched, and young Harold would puke his guts up all night. Still, the experience would have no lasting effects.

I showed young Harold the scar on my top lip.

'That's funny,' he said. 'My father has a scar there, just under his moustache. He got it before they moved into Hinderholme. They were playing at hide-and-seek around the farm, and another boy came looking for him with a hayfork.'

'Well,' I said, 'on the way home, you pick up with students from other universities who've been at Besançon, Bâle, Lille and Nancy. The boat's gone, and you have to spend a night in Dunkirk. There are quite interesting brothels in Dunkirk. At one, when some unsuspecting sailor gets on to the job, they wind up a partition between the room he's in and the café next door. When you troop out, pretty well oiled, you find, in a pool of blood under a lamp-post, a Lascar's top lip. I don't think it's your idea. I think it's the idea of a sophisticated youth from Birmingham. However, you've all read a good deal of Baudelaire and so on, and you decide that cannibalism might be a thing to boast about afterwards. At the hotel, you toast the top lip and then cut it into small pieces. You're lucky. You get a crisp bit without moustache. You're the only one who gets it down. At the end of it all, you're the only cannibal among them.'

'Well,' said young Harold, 'I don't see how that gives you a scar on your top lip.'

I will say this. The conversation didn't appeal to Harold. I nevertheless persisted. I asked him whether he'd noticed a scar on pseudo-Atha's top lip. He hadn't. Quite right. There wasn't a scar on pseudo-Atha's top lip. I'd got mine two years later. In a pub off Charlotte Street, I'd met the sophisticated youth from Birmingham, now a flourishing journalist, a crime-reporter

when he got the chance and in his own mind an authority on the underworld.

He told everybody about this episode of the Lascar's lip in Dunkirk, made a hero of me and threw his money around. He was very keen on his own virility, which wasn't conspicuous, and he'd nursed resentment against me for seven years. Because of his intimate knowledge of criminal ways, he carried a razor in his boot-top. Resentment and razor came out in Rathbone Place after closing time. He was quite easy to knock down and disarm, but he'd got in one slash as I stepped back. I was with a girl called Felicity Deems.

I said:

'As you see, the scar isn't much. But it's astounding how much blood there is in a top lip and how the lip will swell, way out beyond your nose. . . .'

Young Harold didn't like this talk. At any rate, he'd vanished.

IV

THE THING WHICH THE NEAR FUTURE HELD IN STORE for me was that my father died. This left me, technically, head of the Atha family, although my mother is still alive and although I shall never quite feel head even of my own brood while my father-in-law, Idwal John, J.P., lives.

Early this year, we moved our London accommodation from Pitt Rise to Lower Green Road. The neighbourhood is less elegant, our rooms more numerous. The year's chief incidents so far have been my jaundice, Blod's miscarriage and an amusing conference in Oxford. The effects of jaundice are said to be lingering, and it may be that I view life with a jaundiced eye at present. Certainly, at the moment, I seem a bit queasy-gutted, but perhaps this is due to the dust and the heavily chlorinated water, which in its turn is due to the continued presence of bodies under the ruins.

This is Frankfurt-am-Main. My room is on the second floor of the American Press Club, formerly the Carlton, grandest of the remaining hotels. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was born in this city two hundred years ago. My presence here is due to that fact.

The Examiner has also agreed that I am to cover the Sessenheim idyll, and so by Friday evening next week I shall be on the other side of the Rhine again.

It is quite a pleasant room. The ceiling is high. The wallpaper, though faded, is clean, the faint design a pleasant one of flags and reeds, of Japanese inspiration. Four doors along the corridor, Heinz Friedenthal is no doubt cleaning his teeth with the bottled spa water he brought up for that purpose.

Odd, to think I had almost reached the age of thirty-eight before I ever went up in a civilian aircraft or flew by day. I can't say I much enjoyed the accompanying sensations, though my ears seem unbunged now and I suppose my soul has at last caught up with my body. It was interesting to discover that there is an horizon in cloudland. A bit disconcerting to see no angels sitting on the clouds.

Friedenthal, who became a Catholic five years ago, furtively crossed himself at the take-off and again at the landing. Last year, in Hamburg, he had one of those apparently providential escapes, missing a plane which crashed (so that his wife in London thought he'd been killed). In the air, he drank a fair amount of brandy, but appeared confident that the plane would stay up, even when it started bounding and ducking over mountains, a shining river, at one moment the Rhine, at another the Main, vanishing and unaccountably reappearing, and the small boy in front was sick. I wasn't so sure. However rough it may be, there is always visible water under a boat. An aeroplane is kept up by hypothesis, by scientific 'laws' which, for all one knows, may be disproved while one is in the air.

We bumped gently several times, and the aeroplane neither turned over nor burst into flames. We'd gone forward to land, at the steward's suggestion, and one's eyes were troubled by the dazzle of retarded propellers, which, before the take-off, I'd thought was the quivering of the fabric and that it would go on. Except for one's eardrums, one felt suddenly comfortable and rather tired. We taxied for miles around the airport. As the engines finally stalled, we heard the tannoy system.

'... Calling Major *Raabinson*. Major *Raabinson* report to A Block immediately, please. Calling Major *Raabinson*. Will Major *Raabinson* report immediately to A Block. Calling Major *Raabinson* ...'

The sun burned down. In the end, we had got everything stamped that needed stamping and been issued with everything that needed issuing for the moment. Woods had been cleared for the Rhine-Main airport, and the bus drove along a cobbled road through woods, then out on to the *Autobahn*, past allotments, factories, ruined houses, then wooden, makeshift shops, a gay wine-tent, banners and flags in a main street, the new German flag (red, black and gold), the blue-and-white municipal banner. Over the station entrance, in massive green bronze, a figure of Atlas, with two helpers, bearing the weight of Frankfurt on his shoulders.

Before the dark, smooth but frightened civilian receptionist could give us our rooms, a stocky, blond, tough-looking American colonel angrily scrutinised our passports and threw us hostile glances. An American bar, American drinks kept in a big, dark-red refrigerator advertising coca-cola. American voices, American food with a German accent which improves it, good coffee.

The bridge near the Carlton used to be called the Iron Bridge. Now they're rebuilding it, the Americans call it the Golden Bridge. Iron means something quite special to the Germans. No other people would have an iron cross as its noblest military decoration. In American military notices, the Germans are called 'indigenous personnel' (what they may use and must not). The other bridge is called the Old Bridge, but even before the war it was the *new* Old Bridge. These topographical details from Friedenthal.

He knew this town before the war. He remembers it chiefly in 1932, just before Hitler's advent to power, still a 'sober' town (not sure what the German word would be). It was, he says, probably the only German city which had remained 'sober'. One 'escaped' to Frankfurt, he says. He remembers a group of intellectuals who centred about the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. They'd sit in a smoky little *Weinstube*, drinking Palatinate wine served in jugs, talking art and philosophy. There were Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Paquet, Martin Buber. Benjamin poisoned himself in Paris in 1940, when the Nazis occupied that city. Paquet was killed here in an air-raid in 1944. Buber's independent Jewish state now exists. Friedenthal says he last heard of Ernst Bloch, a philosopher, washing dishes in a San Francisco hotel.

There are still black-marketeers loafing around the station entrance and elsewhere in the streets. One sees American soldiers with girls, and the German youths jeer at the girls. I thought one lot were going to start a fight this evening. Friedenthal describes this American occupation as the meeting of two barbaric cultures.

Gaily decorated brewery horses. Quite nice by the river. The church with the cross was the *Paulskirche*. We opened the only serviceable door in the remaining fabric of the cathedral and were confronted by the boot soles of worshippers packed into a vestry for Benediction. We shall be able to look inside the nave and sanctuary to-morrow, when the workmen are there. At the other end of the town, a medieval tower intact, the *Eschenheimer Tor*, and a bit of the old city walls. The past is very obstinate.

A flat, extensive town, with its heart torn out. A muttering, hateful town. No, a silent town. In the other, my rose-red city, rather less than half as old as time, the bells ring so loud all day you seem to hear them at night, too. Not here. A city without a tongue in its head. Silent, formless.

A siren. A police car, I suppose. It approaches, recedes. Then silence again. The smell of that chlorinated water from the tap. I don't fancy even cleaning my teeth with it. I must get bottled water from the bar, like Friedenthal.

MOUNTAINS OF PINK DUST AND RUBBLE, WITH FRAGMENTS of history sticking up out of them. Willow-herb, yellow ragweed, just like the parts of London that haven't been cleared. Worse, though. Much worse. The streets are choked with that dust.

Still, plenty in the shops. More than at home.

Apparently, this has to do with a recent revaluation of the mark. Last year, Friedenthal says, if you smoked a cigarette in the street, anywhere in Germany, people would follow you, hoping to pick up the dog-end. Not now. We, of course, use the PX and buy American cigarettes for almost nothing, but even the indigenous personnel smoke, and most of them look well-fed. Every now and then, you see an ill-fed man in an old military uniform, walking fast with a stick, looking neither to right nor to left, a prisoner, it may be, not long released, who's walked all the way from Russia and is going as far west as he can before he drops. It seems one in eight of the population is now a refugee from the eastern zone.

Young men in *Lederhosen*, very brief. Young women in what is still called 'the new look', rather long, so that the male leg is more in evidence. It is rather a plump and often a carefully bronzed leg. The absence of the male leg is also in evidence. There are too many young men on crutches, far too many. I suppose that a non-existent War Department cannot supply them with artificial limbs.

The *Römer*. Behind us the cathedral. In front, it was just possible to make out the shell of the old council chamber so lovingly described by Goethe in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. A few stalls laid out on the slope, for the centre of Old Frankfurt was built on what, in a flat land, passes for a hill. At the mid-point of all that desolation, a bronze figure of Justice, eyes bandaged, right hand holding a pair of scales, remained intact on her pedestal. Highly symbolic, though of what it is difficult to say.

Odd circumstances bring the past to life. Goethe, for instance. He says:

We did not fail to repair to the cathedral, and there visit the grave of that brave Gunther, so much prized by friend and foe. The famous stone which formerly covered it is set up in the choir. The door close by, leading into the conclave, remained long shut against us, until we at last managed, through the higher authorities, to gain access to this celebrated place. Ah, we should have done better had we continued as before to picture it merely in imagination; for we found this room, which is so remarkable in German history, where the most powerful princes were accustomed to meet for an act so momentous, in no respect worthily adorned, and even disfigured with beams, poles, scaffolding and similar lumber, which people had wanted to put out of the way.

Friedenthal and I did not fail to repair to the cathedral, a lacey, late-Gothic pile of no very great beauty, the spire intact, the walls broached. Workmen were going away and closing a rough door of dusty planks. They opened it for us again. Entering a cathedral, one expects the muted ringing of feet on stone, the reverent murmur of other visitors, an organ softly rousing the echoes, the pedal notes throbbing. Instead, we trod on bare earth, picked our way over bricks and timber and were suddenly appalled by what might have been the shriek of a pig with the knife at its throat.

It was a circular saw, of course, shrieking as the wood met it. In the sanctuary, they were turning out new

choir-stalls and other church furniture on the spot. The cathedral was a mere shell, full of dust and débris. I didn't see Gunther's grave, but then, as I don't know who Gunther was, it doesn't matter. This Victorian translation of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* is full of words I can't quite attach a meaning to. I wonder if 'conclave' means the chapter-house. Herr Lissner, of the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, is a Catholic and a scholar and may know.

A charming man and a good man. He adopts children. His latest is a black child, son of an American negro father, a G.I., and some local woman, his charwoman perhaps. Friedenthal has the *entrée* everywhere. Recorded something or other for the local broadcasting station this morning. Two important figures there called 'Bopp' and 'Herr'. Their office doors on the same landing bear the legends 'Herr Bopp' and 'Herr Herr'. Perhaps this strikes nobody but me as amusing.

The Goethe house also being restored, in time, they hope, for the centenary date. This also, by coincidence, connects up with the first chapter of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* and shall, certainly, thus connect up in *The Examiner*, which eases my work.

At this time, too, my father undertook the reconstruction of the house. In Frankfurt, as in many old towns, when anybody put up a wooden structure, he ventured, for the sake of space, to make not only the first, but each successive storey, project over the lower one, by which means narrow streets especially were rendered somewhat dark and confined. At last a law was passed, that everyone putting up a

new house from the ground, should confine his projections to the first upper storey, and carry the others up perpendicularly. My father, that he might not lose the projecting space in the second storey, caring little for outward architectural appearance and anxious only for the good and convenient arrangement of the interior, resorted to the expedient, which others had employed before him, of propping the upper part of the house until one part after another had been removed from the bottom upwards, and a new house, as it were, inserted in its place. Thus . . .

But that, too, will do for the readers of *The Examiner*.

From the *Römer*, Friedenthal and I made our way along a path cleared through the débris. In a square hole which must have been a cellar, an old man was trying to lay out an allotment. Odder still, at a dizzy height, where a piece of floor projected from the solitary wall of a tall house, three women sat in deck-chairs enjoying the sun.

We climbed over one of the smaller mountains of dust and came into the *Grosse Hirschgraben*. The house is being rebuilt to its original specifications. At present, it is a mere skeleton of new beams and joists, with a few of the original stones carefully inserted into their places over the doorway. A museum to the right of the house is already open. At the back, part of the house stands intact over a courtyard.

THE FLEISCHERFACHAUSSTELLUNG. FRANKFURT IS THE town not only of Goethe, Hölderlin, Schopenhauer, but

also of the sausage and other pig products, indeed of meat in general. To young Goethe, the meat stalls were disgusting, and he flew past them in horror, but Victor Hugo lovingly described the old butchers' quarter in 1838. His description is printed in a German translation in a pamphlet we picked up at the butchers' exhibition. Friedenthal and Herr Lissner translated it for me. It seems to go:

Nowhere else are there such black, such ancient houses, leaning over such luscious piles of raw meat. Their curiously carved and ornamented facades are suffused by I know not what gluttonous merriment; their basements open like a dark abyss to swallow up countless carcasses of sheep and oxen. Blood-stained butchers and rosy butcheresses chat pleasantly, with the joints of mutton strung in festoons over their heads. A blood-red stream, its colour scarcely softened by the rush of two fountains, flows noisily down the middle of the street. Butchers' boys, with faces cruel as Herod's, were even then preparing a blood-bath among the piglets, and servant girls with baskets on their arms yelled with laughter at the shrill uproar.

A butcher's boy was carrying one little pig by its hind legs: it did not squeal, for it had no idea of what its fate was about to be. I confess I wanted to buy the creature to save its life—but what on earth should I have done with it? A small girl of about four, noticing my pitying glances, implored me with her eyes to save it—but I did not do what the child's eyes demanded; I disobeyed their sweet, beseeching gaze, and I reproach myself for it. . . .

But odder people than either Victor Hugo or I have written about this city. De Quincey wrote about it for the seventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, of all things, in the year of Hugo's account.

The present *Fleischerfachausstellung* is laid out on a great cleared space beyond the shopping centre. There are various pavilions, and stalls set out in them sell liqueurs, *bouillon* cubes, gleaming chromium-plated machinery for the manufacture of sausages. The arms of the butchers' guild show a portrait of St. Luke, the patron saint of butchers.

And so, what with Goethe, there are exhibitions both of *Geist* and of *Fleisch*. As Friedenthal says, the latter is the better attended. A defective language, German. The ghost is willing, but the meat is weak.

Friedenthal, Lissner and I went into a pavilion where you get sausages and beer at a counter and sit down at little tables to eat and drink. Three vast glasses of iced lager and three plates, on each of which reposed a freshly cooked Frankfurter sausage and a large dab of mustard. The sausages really were first-rate, pink and succulent. The ladies behind the counter were the wives of the richest butchers, the most elegant of rosy butcheresses.

Herr Lissner once wrote a *Kulturgeschichte* of the sausage, with an appendix on the haggis. Haggis is apparently mentioned in Homer. The suitors gave Odysseus the stomach of a goat filled with meat. Homer also says that at night a sleepless Odysseus turned over and over like a sausage on a spit. Herr Lissner recited the passage to us in Greek, a language I understand even less well than German. His declamation was

accompanied by the sound of a barrel-organ playing Viennese waltzes by the pavilion door.

THROUGH THE AMERICANS, WE HIRE A VOLKSWAGEN AND drive out beyond Bad Homburg into the Taunus mountains, winding through and above pretty mountain villages, pine forest. The Feldberg. A mass of rusted iron and concrete, where the R.A.F. wrecked an observation post. Beyond this to jutting rocks, with an incredible view over the plain.

This is Brünnhilde's rock. Here, ringed with fire, the daughter of Wotan awaited the hero's awakening kiss. Heinz Friedenthal reflects on vanished glory.

We return *via* Wiesbaden and try the *Spielcasino*. Friedenthal plays and wins a little. It is a small room, decorated in a gilded *Kitsch* which reminds one of Lyons' corner houses or the chapel at Ste-Odile or the interior of Sacré Coeur. Not many people. One very beautiful, shockingly well-dressed girl and an immaculate old boy perhaps her father, more likely a rich old *roué* with the incredibly beautiful *fausse-ingénue*.

The liturgy of roulette sounds very odd in German. In a singsong voice, the croupier's dark, heavy-lidded face emits, languidly:

'*Ein neues Spiel, ein neues, bitte . . .*'

A click. The ping-pong ball rolling down a slope.

'*. . . Nichts geht mehr.*'

The ball bounces over the ridges of the purring wheel, finally settles. '*Rot*' . . . '*Schwarz*' . . . '*Zero*' . . . or a number. According to this morning's paper, the

croupiers of Monte Carlo, the aristocrats of their profession, are in America learning to shoot craps. They are going to introduce crap-shooting into the casino at Monte Carlo.

'Ein neues Spiel, ein neues, bitte. . . Nichts geht mehr . . . Rot.'

On Sunday evening, after the last film performance, there is women's all-in wrestling at a cinema in Wiesbaden. We shall need the *Volkswagen* again for that. To-morrow, we escape by another route. From the Valkyrie to Rhine-maidens. After Brünnhilde's rock, the *Lorelei*'s, down the romantic Rhine and back, as it might be to Southend, six marks fifty. The steamer, what's more, is called the *Rheingold*.

MUSIC ALL THE WAY. THE MOST PROMINENT CITIZEN on board was the gentleman who played the accordion. He was the *Stimmungsmacher*. His job, that is to say, was to keep us all in a jolly mood. He called out the places of interest and played alternately fore and aft.

The remarkable thing is how he keeps his own *Stimmung* up. He is a free-lance, lives on tips. He goes to bed at one o'clock in the morning and gets up at half past five.

We started at seven and breakfasted on board. As you approach the *Lorelei*'s rock, the gorge narrows. We took a pilot on board. Till now there had been a merry traffic of barges, from Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands. In keeping with the romantic scenery and the ruined castles, even the entrance to a railway

tunnel was decorated with Gothic pinnacles. But now, as if entering into the spirit of the thing, the sky grew suddenly darker, and it was cold. The water swirled, and it was easy to believe that inattentive boatmen had rushed here to destruction.

As the air grew colder, the German heart warmed. The *Stimmungsmacher* struck up the tune on his accordion, and they sang:

*Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten,
Dass ich so traurig bin . . .*

Even the Nazis hadn't been able to stop people singing that. As Heine was a Jew, they'd gone on printing it in song-books with the words attributed to 'author unknown'. On the way back, we stopped at the village of Assmanshausen, whose hotels and restaurants are recommended in the best guidebooks. Some of the passengers took an overland route to the *Niederwald Denkmal* 'Germania' monument and rejoined the boat a mile or two upstream. A woman who'd gone off that way with her pretty niece from the country confessed to us that she'd been so overcome with emotion up there that she'd sung 'The Watch on the Rhine', which is forbidden, like walking on the grass.

THE GIRLS HAD GIVEN THEMSELVES APPALLING NAMES. One, for instance, was 'the Bull of Westphalia'. The most amusing was Rosie, 'the Wild Cat of Berlin,' whom the referee (male) had to warn repeatedly for biting, gouging, hair-pulling and other foul play. A

concert of female grunting, shuffling, snarling, panting, whinnying with fright and the occasional shriek. At one point, Rosie claimed that another girl had bit her, and, when the referee wouldn't allow this, she attacked him.

A young man in front said to his girl:

'Ich glaube, wir machen's doch lieber auf die alte Art.'

'Benimm dich, Egon!' she said.

He laughed. She viciously clawed his hand. I asked Friedenthal what the young man had said.

'I think we do it the old way,' he translated.

It was all very much rehearsed. One or two of the tougher-looking girls made one think uncomfortably of what one had read about sadistic female gaolers in the concentration camps, but for the most part they were handsome, intelligent-looking young women. They avoided the dangerous holds, and they had a certain technique. It was not quite *Freistil*.

I seem to remember Sachsenhausen as the name of a concentration camp. Sachsenhausen lies across the river, a bit downstream. One goes there in the evening to drink cider at old inns with a wreath or bush over the door. One eats cheese and *pretzeln*, and a fiddler strolls playing between the crowded tables. Very *gemütlich*.

This morning, an orchestra played Mozart and Lehar in the open air at the *Palmengarten*. In the afternoon, we looked in at an alleged Latin-American revue in the *Tiergarten*. Quite ludicrously bad. A keeper at the *Tiergarten* has been arrested on a charge of poisoning the animals. To-day's paper also reports five suicides in Frankfurt during the past week.

The weather still hot and dry. Better if it rained, with

all that dust. Still, no wind to blow it about. *Rosenkavalier* to-morrow, in a patched-up public hall. Both the playhouse and the opera were destroyed. Hope better than Latin-American revue.

A FRIENDLY AMERICAN JOURNALIST HAS OFFERED TO drive me all the way, on Friday. This is marvellous. As he is going to Stuttgart, he will have to drive pretty well a hundred miles out of his way. Tried, by murmuring about petrol, to suggest payment. He says I can buy him a dinner on arrival. Friedenthal off to Munich to-morrow.

Have written to the regional poet and the Gascon head of broadcasting. Hope to see him, and the regional poet should be helpful about Sessenheim and local apocrypha about the idyll.

Rosenkavalier excellent. Really very creditable to keep up municipal singers, full-time municipal orchestra, first-rate musical director to the municipality, under those conditions. What a good opera *Rosenkavalier* is, especially Act II. Still, that's about all I shall remember with any great pleasure. In 1765, when he set out for Leipzig, Goethe avows that he left Frankfurt with indifference. So do I.

AND NOW I AM BACK AT THE SAME HOTEL, BUT NOT IN my old room on the fourth floor. I preferred that room. I suppose that here I face in the same direction, but, from the second floor, I have no clear view over the

shell of St. John's or, craning to the right, despite a rudimentary balcony, any glimpse of the *ponts couverts* and the *grande écluse*, let alone of gable-tops in Little France. Even the sounds of bells does not reach me with the same distinct clarity, but penetrates confusedly through the street murmur, in which I am more nearly immersed.

I have not yet seen Jeanne. A thin, older woman makes the beds on this landing and never, I am sure, lies vigorously in them. I have not seen Joseph, who looks like Anton Walbrook. I haven't yet even seen Mademoiselle. When I arrived, late yesterday afternoon, after those fast, smooth, sunny miles down the otherwise deserted *Autobahn* and the dusty half-hour in the customs shed at Kehl, Erich von Stroheim himself stood behind the reception desk, with beaming smile and plunging handshake.

Pierre and Serge are still here, still gay and charming. They recognised me at once and came across to thank me for the English cigarettes I left for them last year. There is no great festival this year, but the hotel trade is booming, because of a pan-European conference next month.

The Hon. Bert has gone. His successor no longer occupies the separate premises in Titmouse Street, but is installed at the smart new consulate-general. This morning, the only person on duty there was a young and very pretty secretary. Either Hon. Bert's successor looked in, or she telephoned him at home, for this evening there was a note in my pigeon-hole inviting me round to his house for afternoon tea or a glass of sherry to-morrow.

Also looked in, this morning, at the railway administration, just round the corner, in the station square. The man who shares an office with him told me that Fritz Willm is away on his holidays and will be away all next week, in the mountains.

No doubt the Gascon head of broadcasting will be off somewhere over the week-end, fishing perhaps. I shall look him up on Monday morning. Even if she is not away, Mme P. will have all her family at home, and there will be guests. I look forward to a somewhat desolate Sunday. My late afternoon is fixed, of course, though I can't expect the new press officer to be quite up to Hon. Bert's standard in the way of amusement, and there is all the rest of the day to consider.

In Kehl, the French customs were rather tough with us. Perhaps that is why I feel a strange disinclination to make that point on the Rhine the object of my Sunday-morning excursion. Or perhaps, having circumvented them on arrival through the kind offices of my American friend, I don't want to see ghosts rising yet. For that reason, too, I don't fancy hanging around the Orangerie. The only ghost so far is that of myself last year.

FIRST MISCALCULATION. KNOWING THAT I WAS TO ARRIVE on Friday evening, the regional poet and the head of broadcasting got together and laid on a car for an expedition to Sessenheim on Saturday. While I considerably twirled my thumbs, reluctant to disturb the two men at the week-end, they waited impatiently

for me, tapping their feet, looking at their watches.

Head of broadcasting not unfriendly, but clearly feels that no more can be expected of him. He misses Hon. Bert. The new man (he was playing tennis when I arrived on Sunday) is sufficiently amiable, but a little remote and quite without either Hon. Bert's vivacity or his social graces.

Of Hon. Bert, head of broadcasting said in his machine-gun French:

'Il a été fait sur mesure pour nous.'

I rang up the regional poet. Forewarned, I was able to begin with profuse apologies, denunciations of my own stupidity and so on, thus disarming him. He is, in any case, not so busy a man as the rosy-hued, liquid-eyed, quick-moving, plethoric Gascon. So to-morrow the regional poet is laying on another car, to be driven by his son. I had rather hoped it might be Mme Zix, but could do no more than vaguely enquire after her health.

Respects duly paid to the consul. Invited to his house for dinner to-morrow, after the Sessenheim expedition with regional poet. Not sure if I met the consul's wife at the King's birthday *cocktail* last year. Head of broadcasting's family never installed here, still in Tarbes. Otherwise, no doubt he too would have invited me home to dine, despite the irritation I unwittingly caused him on Saturday.

WE DID NOT MAKE IT. THE REGIONAL POET LIVES IN A state of constant irritation with his son, whom he

blackguarded every time the boy was out of hearing and of whose driving he was critical at every turn. A battered little car started knocking already as we drove through Wantzenau and, after several times stopping and being restarted, finally settled down a mile or so short of what I suppose was Drusenheim.

It was very hot. After various attempts to start the car by pushing or by letting it run in reverse downhill, the regional poet and I sat in it baking (there was no hood, and there was no shade of trees we could get into), while the son, goaded by his father, performed various inexpert and hopeless tinkerings under the bonnet and under the car itself.

Eventually, I walked to the outskirts of the village at the top of the gentle slope in front. I found a grocer's shop which had a petrol pump beside it and which also served wine, nicely cooled. The proprietor was out at the moment, with his car. He might be expected back in half an hour or so, when he would no doubt drive us into town, taking charge of our abandoned car on the return. I returned to the regional poet and his exhausted, resentment-choked son. The poet viciously proposed that his son should stay with the car, but I persuaded him that we should all walk back to the grocery and drink a glass of wine. It was almost an hour before the proprietor appeared, but in due course he drove us into town.

Nice dinner with the consul, outside in a corner of his garden, where we stayed with the brandy after dark. To-morrow, I shall be driven to Sessenheim by the consular chauffeur in the consular car. For this I shall pay, but the charge will be modest.

TUMMY UPSET, FEEL SORE INSIDE. ONLY THING IS NOT TO eat. Emptiness produces unpleasant sensations of its own.

Still, I have been to Sessenheim. That way Goethe galloped and, having wormed his way into the graces of Pastor Brion's family, seduced the younger daughter and left her with a baby, or so it is thought.

The nastiest of all the romantic sexual cads is Alfred de Musset, but the young Goethe runs him close. He did not also require the various girls and women to be his mother, nor did he afterwards write poems denouncing them and blaming them for his misfortunes, but he gave class reasons for leaving them flat. These, to us, are incomprehensible. It was not even a peer-and-shopgirl matter. To us, a clergyman's daughter of one's own religion is at least as respectable as the son of a provincial lawyer whose parents had been in trade.

The present-day incumbent (previously written to) was helpful, charming and intelligent, a young man. It is a fine tradition that Albert Schweitzer came out of. I saw the romantic furniture, more especially the boxed-in, lattice-fronted pew, painted green, in which Goethe and Friedrike held hands during the services, and the lightly wooded mound in the fields where they sat of an evening.

The old inn '*Zum Ochsen*' stands next door to the church with its shiny, black-tiled onion spire. The chauffeur and I drank beer at the inn, where I also bought postcards, some photographic, others reproducing engravings of scenes from the Sessenheim idyll, the two daughters spinning before the door, the family at table, Goethe and the girl sitting soulfully on a rustic

seat on the mound, Goethe arriving on horseback. I am sick of this Goethe, though I dare say that is not the line my further piece for *The Examiner* should take.

Perhaps I ought not to have come here again this year. The currency restrictions being what they are, one is inclined to accept any job which involves foreign travel. All the same, I do not think I should have accepted the Frankfurt-am-Main assignment unless I had been able, cleverly as I thought, also to get *The Examiner* to let me cover the Sessenheim idyll and thus come here. Now I am here, and I wonder why.

Even the execrable Alfred de Musset discovered that to revisit the scenes of a former happiness is inadvisable. Not-quite-so-young Atha was doing it and was wretched in part for that reason. Now the pendulum has swung again, as I might have known it would.

IF I AM NOT GOING TO EAT, PERHAPS I OUGHT NOT TO exert myself physically. However, here I am, three hundred and fifty feet in the air, having climbed five hundred steps. My stiff-covered exercise-book lies open on a parapet of gritty pink stone. My knees tremble a little, but only with the exertion.

This second phase of hunger is faintly exhilarating. On awakening this morning with bells all about me, I felt dreadfully sore inside, could not think of breakfast, tried to cut down on cigarettes (which do seem to irritate even the stomach, though I can't think how, since that isn't where the smoke goes). I rang up Mme P., as I've been meaning to do all week. Inevitably, I

was invited to lunch. I had to explain that I could not eat and suggest that I might perhaps look in briefly before lunch, which I did. No guests at the Prefecture. P. in Paris, both children away. The panther, no longer a cub, prowls behind bars in Mulhouse.

I went back to the hotel and lay on my bed until three o'clock. I had a sudden craving for tea. I could have got tea at the Aubette or at the *pâtisserie* in Titmouse Street, but the sight and the sickly-sweet smell of the pastries I should have had to order (even if I didn't eat them) would have turned me up. I described the situation to Erich von Stroheim, not very hopefully.

With a wave of his plump, white hands and a word or two of dialect in the direction of the plump, jolly women at the counter, he caused a chromium-plated teapot to appear before me, immersed in it a small bag of Lipton's tea attached by a silk cord to the handle. Bliss. After a few more pots of tea, without milk or sugar, I may be able to start eating again. Indeed, I have already managed two dry rusks, at E. von S.'s suggestion. This very evening, I might go so far as an omelette or a *soufflé* or a trout *pochée au bleu* or a bowl of clear soup.

Nothing to it really, apart from the emptiness and a gentle nausea. The whole thing may be nervous in origin, *anorexia nervosa*. A fast is symbolic, though I can't think what it symbolises in the present instance. A vigil, but I have no ordeal or initiation to face.

I am leaving this town, of course. And this time I do not think I shall want to come back. I do not feel anxious or even guilty, except perhaps very slightly about Annelies and, in a quite different way, about

Jeanne, about, that is to say, the mere churlishness of not even going up to the fourth floor or enquiring. I feel that she's not there. I feel that she's either on holiday or that she's left the hotel. Mademoiselle is on holiday, resting before the conference rush next week.

In the spring, I gave Blod a pretty bad time, but a man with jaundice may be excused his evil temper. That's over. We shall meet happily again, old Flower-face and I. By now, she'll have taken the children down with her to Welshport. I shall join her there towards the end of next week. Then Oxford again, all of us this time. Arlette first, I suppose.

No trouble over the journey. This year, they have got first-class sleepers on the line between here and Paris, so no sharing, no blanket-snitching personage overhead. From Paris, a place safely reserved on the Golden Arrow, real comfort. No heavy chores on return, just see my Sessenheim piece through the press and collect a luxury fee and account for my expenses, which have not been heavy.

Finding Annelies would not have been easy, might well have been impossible. I feel certain I should have drawn a blank in Sarrebourg. If fate had decided . . . Not sure I believe in fate, but if fate had decided that we should meet, it would have been just as likely that we should meet on some unexpected pavement or at somebody's house or up here. Odd if that turned out to be why I had come up here this early evening. I hadn't really intended to do any such thing.

This is the bay at the top of the south-east *tourelle*. The round slopes of the Black Forest are largely in sunlight but with a dark quarter to the left. The Rhine

is a bright ribbon. Suppose I heard steps from below, then out in the open, and Annelies stood beside me, like the young German beside after-all-quite-young Atha.

But he, wintry Atha, was so occupied with desperate calculations, it may be he needed some intervention by fate. I wonder what happened to the young German. Perhaps he was killed in Russia or still languishes in a Russian prison. Perhaps he made a fortune on the black market in (was it?) Lübeck. He served his turn. I ought to be grateful to him. It is summer now, outside and, by and large, in. I am not standing here nagged at by any dark thought.

At least, I suppose I am not. I am ghost-free. The sun is strong upon the back of my head. It brightens the Virtues and Vices, the wise and foolish virgins, the human seraphim walking past, insect legs waving feebly to and fro beneath them. It presses through the great rose window, filling the nave with contusions of red and purple light beneath the turquoise copper of that roof and the dry gargoyles.

The comfortable, brown-tile roofs and stepped gables are all about my feet. That green patch is the Orangerie. I could not, I think, jump clear. There is no sound of ascending steps. A sound has in fact just started about fifty feet below me, but it is not the sound of steps. It is a dry, grating sound, with, somewhere beyond it, the hollow sound of irresistible traction, like the cough of hydraulic brakes. Metal surfaces yield and separate, first the dry, flaking surfaces, then the more cunningly jointed, closely married, oil-smooth. The great bell has tilted, and the clapper drops once. The bell swings.

The clapper drops again with greater force, and the stone vibrates beneath my feet and my hands.

I could not walk down the steps now, past that bell, the ground tilting below me. I suppose it must be tolling for Benediction. It will go on for ten minutes or so. At two seconds between each peal, that makes three hundred. Either I must wait, or I must go down the other way. I could not jump clear, I am certain. I should catch one foot on an ornament of stone, then pitch forward, arms and legs flying, hit the green roof and roll over its ridges down to the gutter of lead behind its pinnacles, lying there until consciousness ended, while the bell shook and thundered overhead.

THE STEEL HAND-BASIN PUSHES UP AGAIN INTO THE wall and clicks home, almost silently. The wall is a pale green-grey. I have folded the matching linen cover down, and the book lies open on two red blankets. I suppose that we must already be nearing Saverne and that shortly thereafter we shall go underground, appropriately near Sarrebourg.

I must either take this action or not take it. The action itself allows a variant. I could first knock, that is to say. In neither case do I need to do more than turn round before proceeding.

Neither of the two questions in my mind is susceptible of complete answer until the action is taken. If I have guessed the answer to one of them wrong, the other may never be answered. The possibility of it not being answered exists even if my guessed answer to

the other question is right. There could be deliberate refusal of an answer. There could be hysteria, panic and denial of a right answer to the other question, *viz* that the catch was drawn back.

As to which of the two women it is beyond that door, I am half-committed to my answer, but part of my resistance to the alternative is simply due to the feeling that such a coincidence would be too remarkable, too marvellous, too poetically strange, too arranged (by fate, I suppose I mean). After all, the sum of my evidence was quickly gathered and is tenuous.

I had barely stepped out of the door of this compartment when the door to my right opened and a woman emerged, turned right and walked briskly along the corridor. I did not properly see her face, but merely felt that about the head there was something familiar. The woman wore a long, closely waisted dressing-gown or house coat of lilac satin. The short hair was artificially red, the neck smooth and white, the hips certainly feminine but without slackness, the movement and the set of head and shoulders admirable.

Leaning against the window rail at a point midway between my door and that out of which the woman had come, stood a tall, angular young man with a small dark moustache and sharp, unattractive and unintelligent features. He seemed to me out of place. I suspected him of being a second-class passenger who had loitered this way out of curiosity, perhaps indeed with the distinct idea of striking up an acquaintance with some woman in a sleeper. It may in fact be that he has a sleeper further along the corridor, but in that case it was odd that he should choose to loiter in the corridor

elsewhere than outside his own door. This stray young wolf is important only in so far as his presence may be thought to have affected the woman's behaviour when she returned to her compartment, inhibiting her in a minor degree.

The lilac *negligé*, the neat red hair, the neatly placed, rapidly moving feet in mauve slippers reappeared. From the front also, the immediate effect of her figure was that it was exemplary. No slackness *au balcon* either. And it was Mme Zix. That is to say, in the first instance, I did not in the least doubt that it was she.

She, of course, had not observed me at all when she came out of her compartment and turned right. At most, she might have noted that two men stood there. That stretch of corridor is not more than seven or eight yards long. She would cover it in less than twenty steps, and the time it took her, from her first reappearance, to take that number of steps and insert the key of her compartment into the door can hardly have been more than twelve seconds, was almost certainly less.

During that interval of time, she had to adjust her mind to the recognition of me, notice the wolf awkwardly placed between us, adopt a facial expression appropriate to her judgment of the circumstances and bow slightly to me as she turned left with the key in her hand. The face expressed pleased recognition. Of that, I think, there is no conceivable doubt. It was a split second between that and the inclination of the head, barely raised again when the key was in the lock.

My own behaviour was inhibited by the wolf. I should have begun to speak while returning the inclination of the head, but the first sound of a voice would have caused him to turn sharply. All propriety would have been gone. We could not talk across him, and he was not the kind of young man who would have collected himself and vanished with a brief apology. He would have stood foolishly there for at least as long as our momentary exchange of politenesses and the unspoken question and answer would have taken. I have some eye to propriety myself. Mme Zix is a well-bred, intelligent widow known to all the most respectable citizens of the town some twenty or thirty miles behind us and thus, conceivably, at least by sight, to half the people with sleepers on this train. As to the Annelies of thirteen years ago, we know that her sense of propriety was almost excessive.

For, as the woman entered her compartment, that was the alternative guess at her identity which presented itself to me. It might not be Mme Zix. It might be the girl from Sarrebourg, now older, certainly once married and possibly since widowed, with tinted hair. From my first meeting with Mme Zix, I had noted a resemblance between the two. I had not seen Mme Zix for a year.

I had not seen Annelies for thirteen years. Nor she me. It seems hardly possible that recognition, if it was she, should not have come with more of a shock to both of us. The expression on her face would have been worried, incredulous. Then either she would have dismissed the possibility of the man being me, or even the wolf would not have inhibited some overt reaction. It

is not, that is to say, improper for people who have not seen each other for thirteen years to exclaim in the presence of any third party whatsoever. What there could never have been was the calm acceptance, the discreet intimation.

Moreover, Annelies was bigger-bosomed. Also, I should have thought her taller, though a different style of garment may oddly shorten a woman in appearance, as well, perhaps, as suppress the opulence of a figure.

So much I had reasoned possibly even before the door of the next compartment was shut. Within the next few seconds, I stared the wolf out of countenance, and he loped off. I, in my turn, then went along the corridor. I returned and came back in here.

It cannot have been, it cannot be, Annelies. And yet the impression persists.

That may have been as much as five minutes ago. I have since undressed, cleaned my teeth and so on. The tooth-cleaning I presume to have been audible next door. Not until it was completed did the catch either disengage or engage with a loud click.

I think it disengaged. These chromium-plated fittings are pretty new. Even a comparatively ill-fitting bolt may be pushed home almost silently. On the other hand, a smooth fitting may become so firmly lodged by slight warping or dropping that, on its eventual release, it will ring back with a sound like a pistol shot. I take that to be what happened under the small fingers of the woman next door. From the moment at which it happened, it would be reasonable to suppose that it had, moreover, been intended as a signal. If Annelies (or Mme Zix) had wished to be discreet about it, she

would have disengaged (or, for that matter, engaged) the bolt while I was out along the corridor. Even supposing that she had not noticed that it was in what she regarded as the wrong position until I had come back in here, she could still have rectified it inaudibly while my tap ran and the tooth-cleaning routine proceeded. I see that the bolt on this side is drawn back.

Whatever happens, I must not be heard rattling the knob. I must put my hand to it and turn it silently. On meeting the slightest resistance from a catch on the other side of the door, I must knock, as though I had meant to do so in the first place. The knuckles of my right hand must be already raised before I put my left hand to the door-knob.

I am more than half-inclined to hope that the woman *is only* Mme Zix. If it is Annelies, there will be so extremely much *to be said*. A romantic tale, a human elaborateness completed, may afterwards be agreeable to tell, but may yet be distressing, at the time, to act out, as well as exhausting by the complications it leads to, as well, perhaps, as unexpected in its ending. I would rather, I think, that I were merely seeking pleasure, amusingly conspired at by circumstance, with an attractive and doubtless passionate widow.

That is what I expect. I count on no more than a firm-bottomed, small-breasted body, touchingly short in the bed, the flamy hair and the slightly worried eyes shining under a subdued light from the bed-head lamp. That is all. I shall be granted no revelation about the long significance of my own life. No imaginative creation will be finished.

Left hand to the door-knob, knuckles of the right

hand raised. This is adult child's play. And yet, as I now move, I am aware of some thumping of the heart, a certain weakness at the knees and a kind of spreading lassitude in the shoulders.